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Argentina

2nd Edition

by Michael Luongo, Charlie O'Malley & Christie Pashby

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AN INVITATION TO THE READER

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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AN ADDITIONAL NOTE

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

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FROMMER'S STAR RATINGS, ICONS & ABBREVIATIONS

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system.** In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

Finds	Special finds—those places only insiders know about
Fun Facts	Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
Kids	Best bets for kids, and advice for the whole family
Moments	Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of
Overrated	Places or experiences not worth your time or money
Tips	Insider tips—great ways to save time and money
Value	Great values—where to get the best deals

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

AE American Express **DISC** Discover **V** Visa
DC Diners Club **MC** MasterCard

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- Newsletters highlighting the hottest travel trends
- Podcasts, interactive maps, and up-to-the-minute events listings
- Opinionated blog entries by Arthur Frommer himself
- Online travel message boards with featured travel discussions

What's New in Argentina

Rapid inflation—at a rate of 25% in 2008—means that Argentina is not the insane bargain it used to be. However, prices have stabilized, and the peso has weakened, so it still remains a relatively cheap destination. Let's hope that president Cristina Kirchner keeps a steady keel.

BUENOS AIRES Expansion, higher prices, and renovations are some of the key changes in Buenos Aires since our last edition. With the Bicentennial in 2010, many of the city's streets and plazas have been repaved, such as the Plaza de Congreso and the Plaza de la Republica surrounding the Obelisco, as well as the median within Avenida Nueve de Julio. Unfortunately, one of the city's gems, Teatro Colón, remains in scaffolding, with renovations not likely to be finished for at least another year or two. While still a relative bargain compared to European and North American capitals, hotel rates have substantially increased, upwards of 30% over our prices from the last edition. Some of our favorite places to dine have moved to new locations since the last edition, such as the elegant seafood establishment **Dora** (p. 97), as well as **De Olivas i Lustres** (p. 112).

THE PAMPAS & THE COAST There's more to see and do in our side-trips section. In the Tigre Delta, make sure to check out the **Museo Municipal de Bellas Artes** (p. 177), built into what had been the Tigre Casino, a gorgeous Belle Epoque structure. We have also significantly expanded our coverage of Colonia, in Uruguay. You can still do a day trip, but we list plenty of options for staying for a romantic dinner and overnighting, such as at the **Four Seasons Carmelo** (p. 171) or the **Sheraton Colonia** (p. 171).

IGUAZU FALLS & THE NORTHEAST The stunning falls continue to be the big draw, with visitor numbers shooting up year after year. The national park has added extra amenities accordingly, but the whole experience is becoming somewhat Disney-fied, with restaurants and stores amid the jungle foliage. There is an explosion of hotels in the area and Puerto Iguazú town is less the sleepy backwater it used to be, becoming interesting to stay in with new bars and restaurants. Other attractions in the region are gaining more profile, not least the fascinating wetlands of **Esteros del Ibera** (p. 204).

SALTA & THE NORTHWEST The famous railway ride Tren a las Nubes continues its erratic existence, with frequent suspensions despite a new operator and revamped route. Thankfully, there are many other attractions in and around Salta, not least the wine town of Cafayate with its increasing numbers of excellent wineries to visit, including **Colomé** (p. 227), **El Porvenir** (p. 224) and **San Pedro de Yacochuya** (p. 224). The indigenous village of Tilcara, in Jujuy, is becoming increasingly popular with some excellent new lodges listed. Last, but not least, if you want some genuine *estancia* life for a fraction of the prices elsewhere, go to the mountain hamlet of **Tafi del Valle,** in Tucuman (p. 230).

CORDOBA & THE CENTRAL SIERRAS Córdoba reasserts itself as the party capital, with its prodigious population of students flocking to new bar zones, such as **Casa Tomada** (p. 245), and ever-growing provincial festivals, such as the annual Cosquín blowout and the beer-drenched Oktoberfest in Villa Belgrano. Meanwhile, the city's more genteel side has seen a flowering of new galleries and museums, including the magnificent **Museo Superior de Bellas Artes Evita** (p. 250) and **Paseo del Buen Pastor** (p. 250).

MENDOZA, THE WINE COUNTRY & THE CENTRAL ANDES Wine tourism in Mendoza is exploding, and more and more wineries now have English-language tours. Most wineries, however, now charge for both visits and tastings. New restaurants, including **Tupungato Divino,** in Valle de Uco (p. 290), and **Divina Marga,** in Lunlunta (p. 287), are standouts. In downtown Mendoza, there's a new **Sheraton Hotel** (p. 268) and a handful of other new five-star hotels slated to open in late 2009.

THE ARGENTINE LAKE DISTRICT The most notable new hotel in the Lake District is definitely the **Loi Suites Chapelco** (p. 340) at San Martín de los Andes, with its Jack Nicklaus–designed course. Just west is the lovely new **Lahuen Co** thermal spa (p. 338). Other noteworthy improvements include road work on the notoriously potholed Siete Lagos (Seven Lakes) Route, a handful of new boutique hotels, and the superb new lakeside restaurant called **Butterfly** in Bariloche (p. 323).

At Villa la Angostura, the local ski hill, Cerro Bayo, has made some important infrastructure improvements and has the best slopeside bistro in South America with the Refugio 180°.

PENINSULA VALDES & SOUTHERN PATAGONIA El Chaltén, the rugged village at the base of the famous Mt. FitzRoy and Cerro Torre granite spires, now offers other adventures beyond trekking, including kayaking and horseback riding. A handful of new lodges in El Chaltén are also most welcome, with two new properties by the folks behind the lovely Eolo, near El Calafate, and another by the Explora chain from Chile, both slated to open north of town in 2010. El Calafate continues to sprawl with many sub-standard hotels, but there are a few gems as well, such as the **Hotel Edenia** (p. 374) and the luxurious **Casa los Sauces** (p. 373), owned by Argentina's President Cristina Kirchner.

TIERRA DEL FUEGO & ANTARCTICA Ushuaia continues to be a hub for cruise ships, both those rounding the tip of South America en route from Buenos Aires to Santiago, Chile, and more expedition-style ones heading to Antarctica. There are, frankly, too many new hotels here, most of which are decidedly mediocre. However, **Los Cauquenes Resort** (p. 404), right on the Beagle Channel, is a remarkable exception. Across the channel in Puerto Williams, Chile, a new hotel called **Lakutaia** (p. 415) has started selling multiday, multisport adventures in the hard-to-access Isla Navarino.

1 The Best of Argentina

The distance from Argentina's northern tip to Tierra del Fuego spans 3,650km (2,263 miles). And the scope of experiences you can find here is no less grand, ranging from the cosmopolitan bustle of Buenos Aires to the tropical jungles and pounding falls of Iguazú or the thunderous splash of icebergs in Los Glaciares National Park. Whether you've come to meander the quiet towns of the Lake District or dance the night away in a smoky, low-lit Argentine tango bar, your trip to the Southern Hemisphere won't disappoint. In this chapter, we've selected the best that Argentina has to offer—museums, outdoor adventures, hotels, and even side trips to Chile.

1 THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

- **Experiencing Tango in Buenos Aires:** *Milongas,* or tango salons, take place every night of the week throughout the Argentine capital; the most famous are in the San Telmo neighborhood. Most visitors will be content just to watch as dancers of all generations (most of them amateurs) go through the beautiful paces of traditional Argentine tango. Both the dance and the complex social ritual that frames it are mesmerizing. Brave onlookers can choose to dance as well; most *milongas* offer lessons before the floor opens up to dancers. **El Niño Bien,** Humberto I no. 1462 (✆ **11/4483-2588**), is like taking a step back in time, as you watch patrons dance in an enormous Belle Epoque–era hall. See p. 149. To experience its history, see the intimate tango show **El Querandí,** Perú 302 (✆ **11/4345-0331**), which traces the dance's roots from brothel slums, when only men danced it, to its current leggy sexiness. See p. 147. **Mano a Mano,** Maipú 444 (✆ **11/15-5865-8279** [cell]), a *milonga* run every Thursday by Iceland native Helen Halldórsdóttir whom locals have nicknamed La Vikinga, is a perfect compromise. Even if you don't dance at all, the spectacles and the social atmosphere make for an entertaining evening. See p. 149.
- **Paying Respects at a First-Class Necropolis:** In a chichi neighborhood in Buenos Aires is the beautiful **Recoleta Cemetery,** where enormous, expensive mausoleums compete for grandeur. It's a place where the rich *can* "take it with them," in a sense, and continue displaying their wealth long after death. Among the scant few nonaristocrats buried here is Eva Perón, or "Evita." Children won't be bored either, delighting in playing with the more than 80 cats living among the tombs. See p. 124.
- **The Capital's Best Nightlife Street:** Whether you want to dine at a *parrilla* (grill), try some nouvelle cuisine, bar-hop, or go dancing, **Calle Báez** in Las Cañitas is the place to go. This busy street in Palermo has great restaurants—such as **Novecento,** Báez 199 (✆ **11/4778-1900**), and **El Estanciero,** Báez 202 (✆ **11/4899-0951**)—and some of the most intensely packed nightlife on any 3 blocks of Buenos Aires. See chapter 5.

- **Facing the Abyss at Iguazú Falls:** Two hundred seventy-five plummeting waterfalls fed by the Iguazú River make what is one of the world's most spectacular and dramatic sights. In addition to the falls, Iguazú encompasses a marvelous subtropical jungle with extensive flora and fauna. See chapter 7.
- **Driving the Quebrada de Humahuaca:** A taste of real South America is offered by this rainbow-colored mountain range that extends all the way to Bolivia. The windy road reveals dusty adobe villages, such as **Tilcara,** and striking rock formations. Quechuan women herd goats amid Inca ruins in the distance. See chapter 8.
- **Taking a Train to the Clouds:** The **Tren a las Nubes** is one of the world's great railroad experiences. The journey through Argentina's Northwest takes you 434km (269 miles) through tunnels, turns, and bridges, culminating in the breathtaking La Polvorilla viaduct. You will cross magnificent landscapes, making your way from the multicolored Lerma valley through the deep canyons and rugged peaks of the Quebrada del Toro, and on to the desolate desert plateau of La Puña. See chapter 8.
- **Touring the Jesuit Ruins of Córdoba:** Magnificent colonial architecture set in the rolling green hills of the Córdoba sierras reveals a lost Utopia of arts and learning. It's one of the few examples of harmonious cooperation between indigenous people and European colonizers. See chapter 9.
- **Tasting Torrontes Wine in Cafayate:** Salta's wine region is a sun-kissed valley of pink sand and cactus-dotted vineyards famous for producing an aromatic white wine called Torrontes. See chapter 8.
- **Traveling the Wine Roads of Mendoza:** Less commercialized than their European and American counterparts, Mendoza's wineries are free to visit and easily accessible along roads known locally as Caminos del Vino. The spectacular high Andes form a dramatic backdrop. About 80 wineries formally offer tours and tastings, with those in the southerly Valle de Uco the most fascinating. See chapter 10.
- **Cruising to Chile with Cruce Andino:** Why fly or drive when you can sail through the Andes? With three boats and three bus trips, you can go from Bariloche, Argentina, to Puerto Montt, Chile, in a day on the **Cruce de Lagos** tour. Turning it into an overnight trip, with a stay on the Chilean side, gives you time to take in the beauty of the temperate rainforest and the magic of these mountains. See chapter 11.
- **Whale-Watching at Península Valdés:** From April to December, the giant Southern Right Whale heads to the protected bays off the Península Valdés to relax, reproduce, and recharge. The boats that head out hourly from Puerto Pirámides get remarkably close to these friendly giants. You can spot sea elephants, penguins, ostrichlike *choiques,* and sometimes even orca whales on the peninsula. See chapter 12.
- **Seeing a Million Penguins Guarding Their Nests:** Every autumn, over a million penguins return to mate on a hillside overlooking the Atlantic, in a remote area of Patagonia. At **Punta Tombo National Reserve,** you can walk among these friendly creatures and, if you're lucky, get to see them guarding the babies in their nests. See chapter 12.
- **Watching Ice Calve Off the Perito Moreno Glacier:** It's worth the journey to remote El Calafate to simply sit still and gaze at the majestic tongue of ice that stretches into Lago Argentino. When you see a giant chunk of ice (the size of a bus!) crackle off the glacier into the lake, you'll feel chilled by the power of nature. See chapter 12.

2 THE MOST CHARMING SMALL TOWNS

- **Colonia del Sacramento, Uruguay:** Just a short ferry trip from Buenos Aires, Colonia is Uruguay's best example of colonial life. The Old Neighborhood contains brilliant examples of colonial wealth and many of Uruguay's oldest structures. Dating from the 17th century, this beautifully preserved Portuguese settlement makes a perfect day trip. A few resorts and *estancias* are in the area, making for a great trip extension for overnighting. See chapter 6.
- **Salta:** Salta, which sits in the Lerma valley of Argentina's Northwest, has an eternal-spring-like climate and the nation's best-preserved colonial architecture. It's surrounded by the fertile valley of the provincial capital, the polychrome canyons of Cafayate, and the desolate plateau of La Puña. See chapter 8.
- **Cafayate:** Set amid a pink, sandy landscape of cactus-dotted vineyards, the sleepy town of Cafayate has donkeys grazing on the central plaza and heaps of unlocked bicycles outside schools and churches. The sun-drenched area offers palatial-style wineries and luxurious wine lodges. See chapter 8.
- **Villa Carlos Paz:** A quick getaway from Córdoba, Villa Carlos Paz surrounds the picturesque Embalse San Roque. Although it's actually a reservoir, vacationers treat San Roque like a lake, and they swim, sail, and windsurf in its gentle waters. Year-round, visitors come to Carlos Paz to play outdoors by day and party by night. See chapter 9.
- **Purmamarca:** A little white church built with adobe and cactus sits in front of a rainbow-colored mountain in the northern Jujuy province. It is a picture that can be used in every Argentine travel brochure, and is. See chapter 8.
- **La Falda:** An excellent base from which to explore the Punilla, La Falda lies between the Valle Hermoso (Beautiful Valley) and the Sierras Chicas. Argentines come here for rest and relaxation, not wild entertainment. Crisp, clean air, wonderful hikes, and quiet hotels are the draw. See chapter 9.
- **Chacras de Coria:** Once considered a summer getaway for wealthy Mendoza families, Chacras de Coria is just 20 minutes from downtown Mendoza, but it's offset by its shady, gentle, rural lifestyle. The town has great bistros, excellent small inns, a lovely town square with an antiques market on Sundays, and a great ice-cream shop. See chapter 10.
- **Villa la Angostura:** With cottages owned by a "who's who" of Porteños, Villa la Angostura is becoming somewhat of a jet-set stop in Patagonia. It has plenty of coastline along the northern shores of Nahuel Huapi Lake for sailing, fishing, swimming, and sunning. The sweet main street is tidy and quaint, with good shops and some excellent restaurants. The eastern suburb of Bahia Manzano has a collection of cozy wooden lodges that hug the shore. In the winter, the local ski hill Cerro Bayo may be Patagonia's best-kept winter secret. See chapter 11.
- **San Martín de los Andes:** City planners in San Martín had the sense to do what Bariloche never thought of: to limit building height to two stories and to mandate continuity in the town's alpine architecture. The result? Bariloche is crass, whereas San Martín is class, and the town is a year-round playground to boot. Relax, swim, bike, ski, raft, hunt, or fish—this small town has it all. See chapter 11.

- **El Chaltén:** If you've ever wanted to relive the Wild West, you just might get your chance here in El Chaltén. On the verge of modernity, the area is influenced above all by the ever-present wind and by the beautiful granite spires of Cerro Torre and Mt. FitzRoy, which tower above town. It's a ramshackle place, with few paved roads, lots of half-built homes, and a remarkable selection of good restaurants. The vibe is for adventurers and nature lovers who are willing to sacrifice some comforts for awe-inspiring nature and friendly locals. See chapter 12.

3 THE BEST OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

- **Best Park Walks:** The Palermo park system in Buenos Aires is one of the world's most beautiful. Within the system are numerous parks, such as the Rose Garden and the Japanese Garden, as well as museums such as the **Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires** (Malba) and the **Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.** See chapter 5.
- **Getting Wet Beneath Iguazú Falls:** Take an exhilarating boat ride beneath the plummeting water falls. A number of tour companies operate rafts that speed toward the falls, soaking their awe-struck passengers along the way. This is the best way to experience the sound and fury of Iguazú's magnificent *cataratas.* See chapter 7.
- **Traveling Beyond the Falls into the Iguazú Jungle:** This is a place where such birds as the great dusky swift and brilliant morpho butterflies spread color through the thick forest canopy. You can easily arrange an outing into the forest once you arrive in Iguazú. See chapter 7.
- **Paragliding in La Cumbre:** Jumping off a 300m (984-ft.) cliff and flying with condors is what attracts world-champion paragliders to this laid-back valley in the Córdoba sierra. See chapter 9.
- **Bird-watching in Esteros del Iberá:** The flat marshlands of Corrientes province are a nature lover's paradise and can be explored by boat or horseback. See chapter 7.
- **Raging Down the Mendoza River:** Mendoza offers the best white-water rafting in Argentina. During the summer months, when the snow melts in the Andes and fills the Mendoza River, rafters take on Class IV and V rapids here. Rafting is possible year-round, but the river is colder and calmer in winter months. See chapter 10.
- **Skiing Las Leñas:** One of South America's top ski destinations, Las Leñas boasts more slopes than any single resort in the Americas, with 40 miles of runs, excellent snow, and typically small crowds. Las Leñas also hosts an active nightlife in winter. See chapter 10.
- **Skiing Cerro Catedral:** With a huge investment in new lifts, new development at the base, and consecutive years of heavy snowfall, Bariloche's Catedral is the best ski resort in Argentina. The après-ski scene includes chocolate shops, live music, and happening slopeside lounges. And the views take in the Andes and the beautiful Nahuel Huapi Lake. See chapter 11.
- **Rafting the Río Manso:** There are two sections to this gorgeous emerald river south of Bariloche. The Inferior makes for a great family outing, with bird-watching and fun paddling. The Frontera section takes you through an adrenaline-heavy set of 10 rapids toward the border with Chile. Either way, it's a trip through a beautiful undiscovered mountain valley. See chapter 11.

- **Fly-Fishing in Patagonia:** Few places in the world are as appealing to expert fly-fishers, and as rewarding to beginners and novices, as Argentina's Patagonia. Remote rivers from Junín de los Andes all the way down to Tierra del Fuego draw fanatics who long for solitude, gorgeous scenery and, of course, very big trout. Great guides become lifelong friends. See chapter 11.
- **Lahuen Co Hot Springs:** If your idea of the outdoors includes gentle pampering and peace and quiet, this remote thermal spa deep in Lanín National Park will wow you. Small, natural pools (indoor and out) are heated by natural thermal waters in a volcanic area in the middle of a temperate rainforest outside San Martín de los Andes. See chapter 11.
- **Horseback Riding the Patagonian Steppe:** Discover your inner gaucho on a horseback ride across a beautiful horizon on the wild steppe or into the deep Andes. Horses are cherished here, lovingly cared for by dedicated gauchos. See chapter 11.
- **Hiking to Laguna Torre:** One of the world's finest day hikes takes you from the door of your inn in El Chaltén to the base of the needle-shaped granite spire of Cerro Torre, a legendary challenge for mountaineers and rock climbers. The hike's pinnacle is on the shores of the blustery Laguna Torre, where the wind feels like it just may blow you over. Back in the shelter of the FitzRoy River valley, you'll head back to town refreshed and exhilarated. See chapter 12.
- **Big Ice: Hiking in Perito Moreno Glacier:** Tour operators have been offering guided walks on the Perito Moreno Glacier for years, and guests from around the world strap on some crampons and head out for an hour or so. Those with a good level of fitness can now head much deeper into the glacier with a full-day hike. Peer into deep ice canyons, navigate your way along a frozen ridge, and try to grasp the sheer grandeur of this UNESCO World Heritage Site. See chapter 12.

4 THE BEST HOTELS

- **The Faena Hotel and Universe:** Fashionistas flock to this Philippe Starck–designed hotel in the Puerto Madero district to see and be seen. The lobby has loads of bars and the pool is in the front of the hotel, so players making the rounds here can quickly size up who else is around. See p. 82.
- **Alvear Palace Hotel:** The most exclusive hotel in Buenos Aires and one of the top hotels in the world, the Alvear dates to the Belle Epoque era. Luxurious bedrooms and suites have private butler service, and the hotel's guest list reflects the top names in Argentina and visitors from abroad. See p. 83.
- **Four Seasons Hotel:** In 2002, the Four Seasons took over what was already one of Buenos Aires's most luxurious properties. This landmark hotel has two parts—the 12-story Park Tower, housing the majority of the guest rooms, and the turn-of-the-20th-century French-rococo La Mansión, with seven elegant suites and a handful of private event rooms. See p. 84.
- **Killa Cafayate:** A long, delightful walkway of terra-cotta tiles and ceramic urns leads to a splendid pool and courtyard. The ample rooms overlook the village rooftops, and the friendly owner Martha never leaves the front desk. See p. 225.
- **Iguazú Grand Hotel Resort & Casino:** The best luxury hotel near the falls cannot be faulted. The giant rooms feature

beautiful decor, and helpful staff keep everybody happy. See p. 196.

- **Estancia Los Potreros:** A genuine Argentine ranch located in the rolling green hills of northern Córdoba. Gracious hosts, authentic rooms, and superb horses make for a memorable stay. See p. 257.
- **Park Hyatt Mendoza:** The best-located hotel in Mendoza looks out on the bustling Plaza Independencia. Sipping a glass of Malbec on the front courtyard patio, you're likely to feel like royalty. Rooms are modern, luxurious, and large. There are regular events held here that celebrate the amazing food and wine of the area. See p. 267.
- **Cavas Wine Lodge:** Many new wine lodges are opening up in the Mendoza area, but for now this remarkably luxurious and private inn is the crème de la crème. With its spectacular spa, ultra-isolated bungalows looking across the vineyards to the Andes, and one of the area's most extensive wine cellars, there's no reason to go anywhere else. It affords true romance for food and wine lovers. See p. 283.
- **Llao Llao Hotel & Resort:** With its stunning alpine style, top-notch service, a golf course, a lovely pool, and a plethora of activities, the Llao Llao has it all. It's considered one of the top resorts in the world, with a price to match. Inside, the style is that of an upscale yet cozy hunting lodge. The unbeatable location, perched on a hill surrounded by mountain lakes, offers sublime views from every window. Come here for an unforgettable splurge. See p. 318.
- **Rio Hermoso Lodge:** A sunny fishing lodge nestled in a lush, green landscape, this small lodge has done everything right. From the cozy rooms to colorful cushions, it's wonderfully relaxing and quiet here. And you're only 20 minutes from the adventures waiting in San Martín de los Andes. See p. 340.
- **Correntoso Lake and River Hotel:** A historic landmark that's been carefully restored, the Correntoso keep getting better and better. An interesting spa, lovely pool, great lakeside restaurant and natural decor make this a wonderful base camp in the Lake District. Oh, and one of the finest fly-fishing holes in the entire world is right out front. See p. 330.
- **Eolo Patagonia's Spirit:** A friendly and relaxed home amid the powerful emptiness of the Patagonian Steppe, Eolo is influenced by traditional *estancias* (Argentine ranch farms, dating mostly to the mid– to late 19th c.), but it has modern amenities such as a spa, a wine bar, and a library. It's a place to come live, breathe, and be wowed by the vastness of Patagonia. See p. 372.
- **Los Cauquenes Resort & Spa:** Situated right on the Beagle Channel at the end of the world, this new inn has just about everything you could want—a great wine bar, scenic terraces, a spa, and a gentle feel. Unforgettable. See p. 404.
- **Los Notros,** Perito Moreno Glacier, near Calafate: Location is everything at the Los Notros hotel, which boasts a breathtaking view spanning one of Argentina's great wonders, Perito Moreno Glacier. The hotel blends contemporary folk art with a range of colorful hues. Impeccable rooms come with a dramatic view of the electric-blue tongue of the glacier, making this lodge one of the most upscale, unique lodging options in Argentina. The hotel arranges excursions around the area and occasional informative talks. Plenty of easy chairs and lounges are strewn around the property, so guests can sit and contemplate the glorious natural environment. See p. 382.

5 THE BEST DINING EXPERIENCES

- **Cabaña las Lilas,** Buenos Aires (✆ **11/4313-1336**): Widely considered the best *parrilla* in Buenos Aires, Cabaña las Lilas is always packed. The beef comes exclusively from the restaurant's private *estancia,* and the steaks are outstanding. The cuts of beef are so soft, they almost melt in your mouth. Despite the high price of a meal here, it's casual; some guests even come in sneakers and shorts. See p. 103.
- **Café Tortoni,** Buenos Aires (✆ **11/4342-4328**): This legendary cafe might not have the best service in town, but its historical importance and old-world beauty more than make up for that. Café Tortoni was and remains Argentina's meeting place of choice among intellectuals; even the throngs of tourists don't overwhelm the space. See p. 100.
- **La Bourgogne,** Buenos Aires (✆ **11/4805-3857**): Jean Paul Bondoux is the top French chef in South America, brandishing his talents in the kitchen of the restaurant tucked inside the Alvear Palace Hotel (a second La Bourgogne is in Mendoza). A member of Relais & Châteaux, La Bourgogne serves exquisite cuisine inspired by Bondoux's Burgundy heritage. See p. 104 and 284.
- **José Balcarce,** Salta (✆ **387/421-1628**): The best restaurant in Salta serves incredibly imaginative Andean cuisine in an elegant setting. Guests can sample llama carpaccio or roasted llama medallions with prickly pear sauce, accompanied by Andean potatoes grown in the verdant hills on the outskirts of the city. They're all delicious. See p. 220.
- **Casa Tomada,** Córdoba (✆ **351/153-844-609**): Relive your student days in Argentina's university city. A rambling building of stalls and boutiques leads to a rickety courtyard full of youthful clientele dining on *milanesas* and cold meat platters. See p. 245.
- **1884,** Mendoza (✆ **261/424-2698**): Celebrity chef Francis Mallmann's restaurant in Mendoza has been number one in town for a few years now, and it remains the ultimate Argentine dining experience in the country's food and wine capital. Located inside a century-old *bodega,* or wine cellar, the restaurant serves rugged and tasty local specialties such as *chivito* (kid) and *lechón* (piglet). See p. 271.
- **Lunch at a *Bodega:*** Mendoza is home to dozens of places where visitors can learn more about wine—from how the grapes are grown to how the barrels are chosen. And the lessons usually come with a relaxed outdoor lunch served on a *bodega* patio, with the towering Andes in the distance. The experience is indulgent, informative, and so very relaxing. Try the lunch at **Ruca Malen** or at **Andeluna** or **O. Fournier** in the Valle de Uco. See chapter 10.
- **Patagonian *Asado:*** The gaucho gets things going early. The coals take time to warm up, and then they place the lamb on a cross in front of the heat, and leave it there to roast for hours. Served with a simple salad and a few bottles of Malbec, it's home cooking like you've never eaten. *Estancias* from the Lake District to Los Glaciares National Park humbly offer this tradition daily to visitors. Don't miss it at **Estancia Cristina.** See chapter 12.
- **Lakeside Gourmet Dining in Bariloche:** The capital of Northern Patagonia has some truly excellent restaurants. The best, such as **Yuco, Butterfly,** and **Cassis,** are right atop of the giant mountain lakes, offering views that match the outstanding dining. Be sure to arrive well before sunset! See chapter 11.

2 Argentina in Depth

Argentina is a nation that once was among the wealthiest in the world. It long reigned as the preeminent power on the South American continent. Every building in Buenos Aires, every legend emerging from the Pampas, every abandoned church in the missions, overgrown with vines, tells of this vast country's glorious past. Even the faces on the streets of Argentina's cities are a reflection of a history full of accidents, desires, and the sheer force of a nation's will to shape itself and its perception within the outside world.

1 ARGENTINA TODAY

Cristina Kirchner's term as president has been anything but boring. Early on she picked a fight (egged on by her husband) with the powerful farmers' unions that led to road blockades and fuel shortages and much antigovernment sentiment. Runaway inflation saw prices rise 30%, though government statistics insisted it remained at 7%, discrediting the administration further. The farmers' crisis came to a head when congress split evenly in two, and the deciding vote of the vice president, Julio Cobos (a supposed ally of the Kirchners), dramatically sided with the farmers. Since then, the deep global recession has affected exports, despite a weakening peso. Some hard times are expected ahead, with many questioning Argentina's ability to service its huge foreign debt. Cristina's popularity rating is extremely low, and it is expected that her husband will attempt to retake the reins at the next election in 2011, which is probably what he planned all along.

Despite the clouds on the horizon, nobody is expecting the chaos of 2002, when police shot protestors on the street. Argentina is certainly a more stable country, and the fact that you hold this book in your hand means you are one example of the millions who have come to Argentina as a guest, eager to experience its rich, diverse culture and excellent quality of life. The country is now celebrating its 200-year-old existence, and a new era in the nation's history has begun.

2 LOOKING BACK AT ARGENTINA

SETTLEMENT & COLONIALIZATION

Well before the arrival of Europeans, several distinct indigenous groups populated the area now called Argentina. The Incas had made inroads into the highlands of the Northwest. Most other groups were nomadic hunters and fishers, such as those in the Chaco, the Tehuelche of Patagonia, and the Querandí and Puelche (Guennakin) of the Pampas. Others (the Diaguitas, of the Northwest) developed stationary agriculture. The Mapuche Indians, a warrior tribe based at the very bottom of Patagonia in both Argentina and Chile, were the only Indian tribe never conquered by the Spanish.

The Argentina we know today took shape only after repeat attempts at colonization by the Spanish. Much of Spain's effort was initially aimed at staving off Portuguese expansion in what today is Brazil. The first European known to have laid eyes on the area that would become Buenos Aires was Juan Díaz de Solís, who sailed up what is now the Río de la Plata and named it the Mar Dulce, or Sweet Sea. Ferdinand Magellan retraced the route in 1520, thinking he had stumbled upon a passageway that would take him to the Pacific Ocean. Sebastian Cabot returned on a treasure-hunting expedition in 1526. An exchange with local Indians yielded trinkets of gold and silver, and so Cabot renamed the Mar Dulce the Río de la Plata, or River of Silver, in expectation of riches he hoped to find. Then he returned to Spain to convince the crown that more wealth was to be had in the region.

In 1535, Spain—victorious after having conquered Peru, yet aware of Portugal's presence in Brazil—sent an expedition, headed by Pedro de Mendoza, to settle the region. Mendoza was initially successful in founding Santa María del Buen Aire, or Buenos Aires (1536), but the lack of food proved fatal. Mendoza, mortally ill and discouraged by Indian attacks, sailed for Spain with a hundred of his men in 1537. He died on the way, and his body was cast out to sea.

The Spanish had greater success in other parts of the country. In 1573, Jerónimo Luís de Cabrera founded Córdoba in central Argentina. The city was a Jesuit stronghold, and the religious order established the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba in 1613, one of the oldest universities in South America. Córdoba remained an important city through much of colonial Argentina. To this day, it's Argentina's most important education center, where one out of five residents is a student.

Mendoza, in the shadows of the Andes, was settled in 1561 by Pedro del Castillo. He had pushed into the region from an expedition based out of Santiago, in modern Chile. In 1535, the Spaniards began exploring the Northwest, as they expanded down through the recently conquered Inca Empire, and founded the city of Salta in 1582.

In 1580, Juan de Garay resettled Buenos Aires. His expedition sailed from Asunción, in Paraguay, down the Paraná River. At the time, Asunción was a significant city within the Spanish Empire, and Jesuit missions on the border of what is today Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay thrived, providing economic output and the ability to control the frontiers. Garay had with him about 45 men and, uniquely one woman, Ana Díaz. Díaz's role has been obscured by time, and it is unknown whether she was a prostitute from Asunción who accompanied the troops or whether she should be exalted as a female conquistador. In any case, a woman's touch on the expedition proved to be the charm. Upon the second attempt to colonize, the city continued to grow into a permanent, though small, colonial establishment. Ana Díaz's colonial landholdings were on what is today Calle Florida.

While today Buenos Aires is the cultural and political capital of Argentina, it was a backwater region for a long time during the colonial period. More important were Córdoba, Salta, the Jesuit missions, and other parts of the country closer to Lima and Asunción, the centers of power in the Spanish Empire. Buenos Aires was logistically important in defending the lower half of the Spanish Empire from the Portuguese. Constant skirmishes continued between the two empires, with neighboring Uruguay as a disputed territory. Tiny Colonia, across the Río de la Plata from Buenos Aires, passed back and forth, and its buildings reflect the styles of the two ruling powers. With access to the Río de la Plata and the open Atlantic, however, it was inevitable that Buenos Aires—at first a lonely outpost on the edge of the vast Pampas—would grow to be one of the continent's most important cities.

All revolutions are political as well as economic, and Argentina's was no exception. By the late 1700s, Buenos Aires was the preeminent port within the region, and cattle hides became a major component of the economy. The trade, however, was heavily taxed and strictly regulated by the Spanish crown, so smuggling and circumventing became the norm, along with illicit trade with the British. Downtown Buenos Aires is still riddled with underground tunnels. Many of them opened directly to what had been the port area along the Río de la Plata, and cargo passed untaxed through them during this time period. To this day, it is not clear whether the Jesuits may have built them, even farther back, as secret passage ways. In any case, the merchants' desire to end taxation began to foment, feeding a greater drive for overall political independence.

Indirect trade was not enough for the British. Sensing that the Spanish Empire was weakening, they attacked Buenos Aires in 1806 and 1807. The battles were known as the Reconquista and the Defensa. These battles are memorialized in the names of the streets of Buenos Aires that feed into the Plaza de Mayo, which were the routes the Argentine armies used to oust the British. Able to defend themselves without the aid of Spain, many Argentine-born Europeans began to debate the idea of self-government in Buenos Aires.

The Revolution of Buenos Aires was declared on May 25, 1810, marking the beginnings of the independence movement. On July 9, 1816 (Nueve de Julio), Buenos Aires officially declared its independence from Spain, under the name United Provinces of the Río de la Plata. Several years of hard fighting followed before the Argentines defeated the Spanish in northern Argentina, and the Europeans remained a threat until Perú was liberated by General José de San Martín, considered the national hero of Argentina, and later by Simón Bolívar, from 1820 to 1824. With Lord George Canning as their main representative, Britain officially recognized Argentina's independence. Argentina's relationship with this European world power, however, would remain tenuous.

Spain's defeat, however, did not mean that Argentina had peace. Boundaries and the power structure were still unclear. Strongmen with private armies, called *caudillos,* controlled remote regions, as was the case in other areas of South America after independence. Even with a national constitution, the territory that now constitutes modern Argentina was frequently disunited until 1860. The national debate included the question of whether Buenos Aires would be the new capital.

The internal and external struggles were brutal, changing both the physical and ethnic structure of the country. In 1864, the War of the Triple Alliance (also known as the Paraguayan War), broke out between Paraguay and an alliance of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. Paraguayan president Francisco Solano López saw himself as an emperor and hoped to give the country an Atlantic port. The war, which devastated Paraguay, lasted 6 years, and was among the bloodiest fighting ever on South American soil.

Of the three countries fighting Paraguay, Argentina recovered from the war quickest, and it served as an impetus for unification. From this point on, Argentina was the most powerful and wealthiest country on the continent—and remained so for nearly 80 years.

Modern Argentine historians dispute this subplot, but the Argentine army fought its battles by placing black soldiers at the front lines, where they faced immediate slaughter, ahead of white soldiers. For this reason, Argentina, unlike much of South America, is home to few descendants of slaves brought from Africa.

Argentina's ethnic makeup was further altered in the late 1870s by General Julio Argentino Roca's Campaign of the Desert. Essentially, he drew a line out from Buenos Aires and slaughtered virtually every Indian within it. He claimed to do so in the name of national defense and the economy, in light of the fact that some Indian populations stole cattle and attacked the various *estancias* and forts within the Pampas and Upper Patagonia. The destruction of the native population further consolidated Buenos Aires's control of the hinterlands, and led to a wave of new ranches and *estancias,* and the unimpeded development of the railroads. Now only within the north and the very south of Argentina (areas untouched by Roca) do Indians exist in any substantial numbers.

It was these two specific genocidal policies—toward descendants of African and indigenous South American folk—that laid the ground for the largely white and European culture that Argentina was to become. Needless to say, however, Argentines have a sensitive relationship with this period and often gloss over it in historical accounts. Many historians account for the lack of an African population by arguing that blacks died out naturally or simply intermarried with the millions of white immigrants until pure Africans no longer existed.

The fact that Africans existed in Argentina is most evident, however, in the nation's most important cultural contribution to the world—the tango. Like all musical and dance forms native to the Americas, it owes its roots to slave culture. Photographs of gauchos from the late 1800s also show that many were clearly of African descent. The overwhelmingly white society of greater Buenos Aires that tourists see today was not simply the proud result of millions of Italians and Spaniards descending from boats after a long Atlantic voyage, but was instead the result of a deliberate government policy of genocide.

BUENOS AIRES, THE CAPITAL

Genuine unification of Argentina did not occur until 1880, 300 years after the permanent founding of Buenos Aires. On this anniversary, the city was officially made the capital. The return of San Martín's body that year, to a permanent tomb within the Catedral Metroplitano on Plaza de Mayo, solidified and symbolized the city's absolute authority.

From then on, Buenos Aires experienced a period of explosive growth and wealth, laying the foundations for the glory days that Argentines remember about their country. Trade with Europe expanded, with cattle and grain from the newly conquered hinterlands serving as the main exports. Millions of immigrants came from Italy, Spain, and other countries, filling the city's slums, primarily in the southern sections of La Boca and San Telmo. To this day, there are almost as many Italian last names as Spanish in Argentina. Even the language spoken in Argentina seems almost like Italian-accented Spanish, with its rhythm and pitch. *Lunfardo,* the street dialect associated with tango, owes many of its words to immigrant Italian.

The exponential growth of this time means that Buenos Aires—unlike in Salta, Córdoba, and other old Argentine cities—retains few colonial buildings besides its churches. In fact, by the late 1800s, the capital made a conscious effort to completely rebuild much of its cityscape, following a pattern loosely based on Haussman's plans for rebuilding Paris under Second Empire France. Much of this was to be done in time for the 1910 Independence Centennial celebrations.

Developers laid new boulevards over the original Spanish colonial grid. The most important was Avenida de Mayo,

which opened in 1893 and would serve as the government procession route, linking the Casa Rosada or Presidential Palace on its eastern end with the new Congreso on its western terminus. Lined with Beaux Arts and Art Nouveaux buildings, according to the styles of the time, it became the cultural and nightlife center of the city. Diagonal Norte and Diagonal Sud were also laid out (though not completed for many years later). The widest boulevard in the world, 9 de Julio, was planned in 1888 as well, but its construction didn't begin until 1937. Technically, it remains incomplete.

The majority of Buenos Aires's most iconic structures were built at this time—the Teatro Colón, the Water Palace, the Subway System, Congreso, Retiro Station, and the innumerable palaces and mansions that still line the streets in the northern sector. For nearly 30 years, the city was an ongoing construction site, as it for cefully rebuilt itself with a European image. While Argentina had the wealth and resources to pay for the massive rebuilding, however, it lacked the know-how and had to import its talent, labor, and even materials from Europe. The capital's planners, architects, and engineers came from the Old World, bringing with them the beautiful structural materials that now grace the city. A sticking point for many years was the fact that the British built and controlled the railroads.

Today, as a visitor mindful of Argentina's past several decades of political and economic chaos, it is difficult to make sense of the ostentatiously built infrastructure that remains from this earlier time. In essence, between 1880 and 1910, Argentina assumed the height of its wealth and power. Built at great expense of labor, money, and determination, Buenos Aires was the imperial capital of a country hungry to assert its importance on the world stage. Indeed, at the turn of the last century Argentina was one of the 10 wealthiest countries in the world.

THE CULTURAL GROWTH OF THE 1920S & 1930S

The economic expansion, wealth, and sense of power Argentina had during this time laid the groundwork for strong cultural growth by the 1920s and 1930s. During this period, traditions that had always existed among the lower classes within Buenos Aires bubbled to the surface and came into international recognition. Tango has its roots in slave culture, and immigrants (mostly Italian) adopted the dance as they moved to Argentina. While the dance had always been associated with the slums of the lower classes, one man changed all of that. In 1917, Carlos Gardel, who began his career singing as a child in Buenos Aires's Abasto Market, recorded what is considered the first important tango song—"Mi Noche Triste," which launched him to stardom. Throughout the 1920s, Gardel toured in France. Seeing that Parisians accepted tango, the upper classes within Argentina began to embrace it as well. By the middle of the 1920s, tango became the country's most important musical form; its history and eventual acceptance internationally is akin to the rise of jazz in the United States. Gardel recorded numerous songs and toured Europe, South America, and the United States, making musical movies along the way. He died young, at the age of 44, on June 24, 1935, in a plane crash in Colombia, which solidified his status as one of Argentina's most important cultural icons.

The same period saw a flowering of literature and live theater. Jorge Luis Borges published short stories that often spoke of the struggles of the gangsters and lower classes in Buenos Aires and other parts of Argentina. Along with other colleagues, Borges launched the short-lived literary magazine *Proa* in 1924. By the 1930s, amid political chaos, eminent civil war, and repression in Spain, Buenos Aires became the preeminent center of Spanish-language

culture. Among the most important Spanish artists who came during this period was the playwright Federico García Lorca, who lived in Buenos Aires briefly during 1933 and 1934, staying at the Castelar Hotel on Avenida de Mayo.

The 1930s were also a golden age for Argentine radio and cinema. Many stars came of age at this time, including Tita Morello and Libertad Lamarque. The Argentine film industry's only South American rival was in Rio de Janeiro. Even there, however, stars such as Carmen Miranda, long before Hollywood discovered her, emulated the style of Buenos Aires movie stars who set the trends on the continent. By the 1930s, Avenida Corrientes was also widened, many theaters moved to this new location, and many new ones opened.

Viewed from the edges, the city of Buenos Aires glittered as the cultural capital of Argentina, pulling many a young man and woman in from the provinces to seek fame. In 1934, one teenage girl from the city of Junín in the Province of Buenos Aires would come to do just that, changing Argentine history for ever with her determination beyond the obvious glamour of the stage and screen. Though accounts differ as to exactly how Maria Eva Duarte came to Buenos Aires—whether she was escorted by members of her family or by her purported lover, Augustin Magaldi, one of the country's top tango singers—she was in Buenos Aires for her very first time at the tender age of 15. With little but her looks, charm, and persistence, Ms. Duarte moved through a succession of jobs and men in theater, radio, and film. Many claimed she lacked talent, but with her connections, she became a force to be reckoned with. Various bosses hired her knowing only who her current powerful boyfriends were. Eventually, with success as an actress, she would meet her most powerful boyfriend of all.

THE PERON YEARS

Few eras of Argentina's history play into its modern-day politics like the Perón era. In 1943, the military overthrew Argentina's constitutional government in a coup. Perón was put in charge of the National Labor Office, making him popular among the working class. Unique among members of the military, he had a flare for public relations, courting members of the media as well as young stars. Even during this period, he was revealing what would eventually be part of his persona: He is often the only member of the military smiling in photographs.

Perón's popularity was anchored by an earthquake that occurred on January 15, 1944, in San Juan, a city near Mendoza in the shadows of the Andes. Ten thousand people died and nearly half the city was left homeless. The tragic event became the ultimate public relations opportunity for Perón, as he rallied support for the region. Perón arranged a fundraiser for the victims of the earthquake with a star-studded concert in Luna Park, a stadium in Buenos Aires. Legend has it that at this event, he met 24-year-old actress Eva Duarte, changing Argentina's history for ever. (In fact, photographic evidence makes clear that the two had met before, in Buenos Aires.)

Fearing his rise to power, the military government arrested Perón and imprisoned him on Juan García Island in the Tigre Delta. A near revolt occurred in Buenos Aires, and the government quickly released him. On October 17, 1945 (the most important date in the Peronist calendar), Perón spoke to a crowd gathered from a balcony at the Casa Rosada and announced that elections would be forthcoming. Feeling the need to legitimize their relationship with elections pending, Eva and Perón married secretly in Los Toldos, the town of her birth, using the civil registry. They later married in a Catholic ceremony in La Plata, the provincial capital of Buenos Aires Province.

Ordinarily, the Catholic Church would not have sanctioned the marriage, given Duarte's reputation as a "tainted" woman, but the priest was a relative of Perón's.

Perón became president in 1946 in an election marked by fraud and brutality on both sides. Though Juan was technically the power, he could not have retained his popularity without Eva (nicknamed Evita by the people) at his side. Knowing that their power was based in worker's unions, the couple launched numerous economic and work initiatives, many along the lines of communist-style 5-year plans, and employment and wages spiked under the new regime.

The modern middle class of Argentina, now weakened by more recent economic policies, owes its existence to this period. Eva used her position to create the Eva Perón Foundation, which was as much a public relations tool as a charity service for the first lady. Under the official economic plans and the foundation, contributions were forced from workers and the wealthy alike; land, buildings, and factories were seized from the oligarchs; and the railroads, formerly in the hands of the British, were nationalized in lieu of payment for unpaid war debts owed by Great Britain to Argentina. Throughout the country, the couple built hospitals, schools, and playgrounds for lower-class citizens and their children. One children's park, the Ciudad de los Niños in La Plata, served as the model for Walt Disney when he designed Disneyland, in California. The popularity of the power couple soared among the poor, but the two were despised by the upper classes and the military alike.

After Evita's long insistence, women received the right to vote in 1947, and the presidential elections of 1951 were the first in which women participated. Wanting to legitimize her power within the government, Evita sought to be vice president on the 1951 election ballots, but Perón forced her to decline. Stricken with cervical cancer, Evita was dying, and forfeiting this final fight worsened her health. She voted in the elections from her hospital bed. She was so weak for the inaugural parade through Buenos Aires that they doped her up with painkillers and strapped her body to a wood frame, hidden by an oversize fur coat, so she could wave to crowds.

On July 26, 1952, Evita finally died. A 2-week mourning period ensued, and millions poured into Buenos Aires to pay their final respects. More than a dozen people died and hundreds were injured in the commotion as mourners lined up for days to view Evita's body in its glass coffin. Knowing that without Evita his days might soon be over, Perón commissioned a monument to her, which was never completed, and had her body embalmed to be preserved forever.

A period of economic instability ensued, exacerbated by Perón's own policies. He had, in essence, robbed the country of its wealth by spending on social causes (and siphoning much for his own use). In 1955, the military deposed Perón and stole Evita's body, sending it on a journey that lasted nearly 17 years before it resurfaced. Images of the Peróns were banned in Argentina; even uttering their names was an offense.

Perón bounced through several countries—Paraguay, Panama, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic—before finally settling in Spain, ruled by his longtime ally Francisco Franco. During his time in Panama, he met his future third wife and vice president, Isabel Martínez, a nightclub dancer.

While Perón was exiled in Spain, Evita's body was returned to him, and his power base in Argentina strengthened, allowing his return to the presidency in 1973. Still, his arrival was wrought with chaos. Gun battles broke out at Ezeiza Airport when his plane landed, leaving several of his followers and rivals dead. When he died in

1974, Isabel replaced him. Neither as strong as her husband nor his previous wife, Isabel could not hold onto the country for very long. She took on the nickname Isabelita, to bring back the memory of her predecessor, and, as an occultist, she supposedly held séances over the coffin of Evita in order to absorb her power. Despite her efforts, terrorism and economic instability persisted during her short reign, and on March 24, 1976, she was deposed in a military coup.

THE DIRTY WAR & ITS AFTERMATH

The regime of Jorge Rafael Videla, established in the junta, carried out a campaign to weed out anybody suspected of having Communist or Peronist sympathies. (Ironically, it was in this period that Evita was finally laid to rest in her current tomb in Recoleta Cemetery.) Congress was closed, censorship imposed, and unions banned. Over the next 7 years, during this "Process of National Reorganization"—a period now known as the Guerra Sucia (Dirty War) or El Proceso—between 10,000 and 30,000 intellectuals, artists, activists, and others were tortured or executed by the Argentine government. The mothers of these *desaparecidos* (the disappeared ones) began holding Thursday afternoon vigils in front of the presidential palace in Buenos Aires's Plaza de Mayo as a way to call international attention to the plight of the missing. Although the junta was overturned in 1983, the weekly protests continue to this day in Buenos Aires and in other large cities in the country.

With the Argentine population growing increasingly vocal about human rights abuses and the increasingly worsening economy, the military dictatorship sought a patriotic distraction.

Argentines have long laid claim to the Falkland Islands, known locally as the Islas Malvinas. The basis for the claim is that the territory, which was used for a penal colony beginning in 1828, was part of the Spanish Empire that Argentina conquered when it won independence. Argentina's early military rivals for power over the islands included both Britain and the United States. Argentina proved to be too young a nation with too little power to control such a remote region: The British seized the islands in 1833 by simply sending warships and a gentlemanly note to the Argentine commander in charge, José María Pinedo.

The taking of the Falklands had always been a sticking point among Argentines. In the early 1980s, Argentine President Leopoldo Galtieri assumed that invading the Falklands would be easy and bring much needed support to his government. Galtieri believed the invasion would go almost unnoticed by the United Kingdom (unbelievable in retrospect) because the U.K. didn't really want the islands and would not tolerate a loss of life to protect its far-flung turf. At the United Nations, Argentina had made several attempts to bring up their claim to the Falklands before the invasion, without any response from Great Britain.

The Argentines tested the waters by first invading the South Georgia Islands on March 19, 1982. On April 2, Galtieri launched the full-fledged invasion of the Falklands. The invasion was ill-fated, ill-planned, and tragic; nearly 900 people died in the short war. Most of Argentina's military forces remained on the Chilean border out of concern that British ally Augusto Pinochet of Chile would use the war as a reason to invade his eastern neighbor. Losses were heaviest on the Argentine side, including the sinking of the battleship *General Belgrano* with nearly 300 sailors aboard. Officially, neither side declared war on the other during the entire dispute. While no other powers contributed to the military effort, much of Latin America sided with Argentina, while

Europe and the United States sided with Great Britain.

The war was a diplomatic nightmare for the United States, whose Monroe Doctrine—penned nearly 180 years before—technically required it to declare war on Great Britain. However, the war meant the end of the military regime and the solidification of power for Great Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Virtually forgotten in the greater world, it's almost a joke among English-speaking nations that Argentina would challenge one of the world's greatest naval powers. But the war is a serious issue for Argentines, who still lay claim to the Falklands.

Galtieri's defeat brought about his greatest fear: the collapse of his government. An election in 1983 restored constitutional rule and brought Raúl Alfonsín, of the Radical Civic Union, to power. In 1989, political power shifted from the Radical Party to the Peronist Party (established by Juan Perón), the first democratic transition in 60 years. Carlos Saúl Ménem, a former governor from the province of La Rioja, won the presidency by a surprising margin.

A strong leader, Ménem pursued an ambitious but controversial agenda with the privatization of state-run institutions as its centerpiece. With the peso pegged to the dollar, Argentina enjoyed unprecedented price stability, allowing Ménem to deregulate and liberalize the economy. For many Argentines, it meant a kind of prosperity they had not seen in years. The policies had a dark side, however. The new money controls devastated local manufacturing, and the country's entire export market virtually dried out. World financial crises in the late 1990s, including those in Mexico, East Asia, Russia, and Brazil, increased the cost of external borrowing and further reduced the competitive edge of Argentine exports and industries. The chasm between rich and poor widened, squeezing out much of the middle class and eroding the social support systems put in place over the decades. This destroyed investor confidence, and the national deficit began to soar. Ménem was seen as a corrupt purveyor of cheap glamour. His wife, Cecilia, the former Miss Chile and Miss Universe, was hated by many and regarded as a trophy wife. Rumor has it that members of his government had a hand in the bombings of the Israeli Embassy and the AIMI Jewish Community Center bombings. Some of the accusations bear a racial tinge, given that he was Argentina's first president of Arabic descent.

After 10 years as president—and a constitutional amendment that allowed him to seek a second term—Ménem left office. By that time, an alternative to the traditional Peronist and Radical parties, the center-left FREPASO political alliance, had emerged on the scene. The Radicals and FREPASO formed an alliance for the October 1999 election, and the alliance's candidate, running on an anti-corruption campaign, defeated his Peronist competitor.

Less charismatic than his predecessor, President Fernando de la Rúa was forced to reckon with the recession the economy had suffered since 1998. In an effort to eliminate Argentina's ballooning deficit, de la Rúa followed a strict regimen of government spending cuts and tax increases recommended by the International Monetary Fund. However, the tax increase crippled economic growth, and political infighting prevented de la Rúa from implementing other needed reforms designed to stimulate the economy. With a heavy drop in production and a steep rise in unemployment, an economic crisis was looming.

The economic meltdown arrived with a run on the peso in December 2001, when investors moved en masse to withdraw their money from Argentine banks. Government efforts to restrict the run by limiting depositor withdrawals fueled anger

through society, and Argentines took to the streets in sometimes violent demonstrations. De la Rúa resigned on December 20, as Argentina faced the worst economic crisis of its history. A series of interim governments did little to improve the situation, as Buenos Aires began to default on its international debts. Peronist President Eduardo Duhalde unlocked the Argentine peso from the dollar on January 1, 2002, and the currency's value quickly tumbled. Within a few months, several presidents came and went in the ensuing crisis, and several citizens died in street protests throughout the country. The country's default to the IMF was the largest in history.

Argentina's economic crisis severely eroded the population's trust in the government. Increased poverty, unemployment surpassing 20%, and inflation hitting 30% resulted in massive emigration to Italy, Spain, and other destinations in Europe and North America. Anyone who had the passport to do so fled to Miami, Milan, and Madrid in particular. *Piqueteros* and *cartoneros,* the protestors and the homeless, became a visible presence throughout Buenos Aires and other large cities, as the unemployed in rural areas picked garbage for a living. Many of the protestors, it is claimed, have been paid off or fomented by various factions in government seeking to further destabilize the country and bring visible chaos to the streets.

Ironically, those who could not flee the country in the midst of the economic chaos stayed behind and built a stronger nation. While under Ménem, Argentina idolized Europe and the United States, now citizens had to look to their own historical and cultural models, the things that were authentically Argentine. The tango—long expected to die out as a dance for the older generation—found new enthusiasts among the young. It had always been seen as a dance that alleviated pain, and there was more than enough of that to go around.

The country further stabilized by 2003, with the elections of Nestor Kirchner, the governor of the Province of Santa Cruz in Patagonia, a province made wealthy by oil exploration. Kirchner had proven his economic savvy by sending the province's investments overseas just before the collapse of the peso. A left-wing Peronist, he saw many of his friends disappear under the military regime. He reopened investigations into this dark period in Argentina's history and also went after the most corrupt of Ménem's regime. A consolidator of power, he and his senator wife—Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, became the country's most important political couple. Under Kirchner, economic stability returned, with exports of soy, oil, and meat pumping the economy, a cheap peso and an overall global boom meant there was a hungry market for the raw material Argentina produces, especially with China and other Asian economies. Tourism became the third-most-important economic sector under his administration, with many well-off foreigners deciding to stay and invest in property and business.

Yet Kirchner could hardly be called a reformist and Argentine politics remained mired in a myriad of bitter rivalries, exacerbated by a weak bureaucratic civil service and compromised judiciary. Corruption scandals, such as public works bribes and a Venezuelan cash-in-suitcase election donation, failed to dent the president's popularity, buoyed by a consumer boom and relative prosperity. Sure to win a second term, Kirchner surprised everybody when he put his wife forward instead and she won the presidency in October 2007 with 45% of the vote, making her the country's first elected female leader.

3 THE LAY OF THE LAND

Argentina is 5,000km (3,107 miles) in length and 1,800km (1,118 miles) wide in parts, making it the world 's eighth-largest country with a landmass of almost 3 million sq. km (1.2 million sq. miles). S uch vastness means gr eat contrasts r egarding geographical features.

THE P AMPAS This flat terrain is an agricultural powerhouse and where a third of the population resides. It consists of the central eastern pr ovinces of B uenos Air es and La P ampa and the southern par ts of Santa F e and Cór doba. The climate is humid, with lots of rainfall (900mm a year) and sw eltering summers that for ce much of the population to decamp to the Atlantic coast on its eastern fringe.

PATAGONIA Desolate and r omantic, Patagonia is like a countr y within a country, consisting of four pr ovinces and huge contrasts. The nor thern alpine Lake D istrict is far away fr om the arid steppes that host lots of sheep and few humans and the spectacular glaciers far ther south. The Andes form a wall of ice, blocking rain from Chilean Patagonia on the other side. Comodoro Rivadavia is an oil town, while Rio Gallegos is sustained by agriculture.

TIERRA DEL FUEGO The Andes mountains ar e pulled eastwar d, forming one large island and a multitude of smaller ones holding famous bays and inlets such as the B eagle Channel and the M agellan Straits. Because of this tectonic shift, Ushuaia is the only Argentine to wn on the other side of the Andes and is surr ounded by icy peaks. The nor thern half of the island is a desolate plain of br own fur ze that supports sheep and llama.

MESOPOTAMIA & EL CHACO The north-eastern part of Argentina is hot and humid, with the bor der pr ovince of M isiones resembling a jungle fr ontier. H ere y ou'll find the famous Iguazú Falls and the triple border shar ed with B razil and P araguay and formed b y the Rio U ruguay and Rio Parana. The v ast w etlands of Ester os del Ibera lie far ther south in Corrientes pr ovince. F arther nor th and east, the land becomes a dry, inhospitable shrub, known as El Chaco, that extends all the way to Bolivia.

THE ANDES The Andes form the backbone of Argentina, str etching the whole way from Bolivia to Tierra del F uego and rising as high as 6,960m (22,835 ft.) at Mt. Aconcagua in M endoza province, the highest peak outside the H imalayas. The huge differences in altitude mean the landscape v aries dramatically , with the r ed desert plateaus of S alta province contrasting with the temperate lakes of Tafi del Valle and the humid cane fields of Tucuman. Farther south, the pr ovinces of San J uan and M endoza consist of v ast desert scr ub with little rain. Yet together they ar e one of the most pr olific wine regions in the world, thanks to melted snow channeled to ward the vineyar ds through a vast network of canals.

4 ARGENTINA WAYS & MANNERS

Argentines hav e a dramatic disposition. Witness the spontaneous str eet pr otests where neighbors spill out on the str eet to bang pots and pans, usually pr ompted by an electricity cut or burglar y. A football game can be communal chaos. The deafening chanting amid r ocket flar es and mammoth banners co vering huge cr owds watched by heavily armed riot police is at once terrifying and electrifying. O r sit back in any cafe and watch the exaggerated gesticulations of the patr ons who hav e been ther e since 8am complaining about the politicians, the heat, and the crime,

BOLIVIA
PARAGUAY
BRAZIL
URUGUAY
CHILE
ARGENTINA
PACIFIC OCEAN
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Mar Argentino
San Pedro de Atacama
Antofagasta
ATACAMA DESERT
San Salvador de Jujuy
Salta
GRANCHACO
Pilcomayo
Paraná
Asunción
Iguazú Falls
Salado
San Miguel de Tucumán
Santiago del Estero
Resistencia
Corrientes
Posadas
Uruguay
La Serena
ANDES
Mar Chiquito
Paraná
San Juan
La Falda
Córdoba
Santa Fe
Paraná
Lagôa dos Patos
Lagôa Mirim
Villa Carlos Paz
Rosario
Valparaíso
Mendoza
Santiago
PAMPAS
San Rafael
Buenos Aires
La Plata
Montevideo
Río de la Plata
Las Leñas
Concepción
Coloradó
Salado
Cabo San Antonio
Bahía Blanca
Mar del Plata
Negro
Bahía Blanca
San Carlos de Bariloche
Puerto Montt
Golfo San Matías
Puerto Madryn
Península Valdés
Isla de Chiloé
Esquel
Chubut
Trelew
COSTA
Chico
Archipiélago de los Chonos
Golfo de San Jorge
Cabo Tres Puntas
CORDILLERA
Deseado
Bahía Grande
FALKLAND ISLANDS (ISLAS MALVINAS) (U.K.)
West Falkland
East Falkland
Río Gallegos
Puerto Natales
Estrecho de Magallanes (Strait of Magellan)
Archipiélago Reina Adelaida
PATAGONIA
Punta Arenas
Tierra del Fuego
Ushuaia
Cabo San Diego
Cabo de Hornos (Cape Horn)
0
300 mi
0
300 km
N

Impressions

An Argentine is an Italian who speaks Spanish, acts like a French man, but secretly wishes he were English.

—Argentine proverb

and then gushing o ver the photos of the adorable ne wborn nephe w. E verything is animated, including the exaggerated gr eetings and far ewells when ev erybody rises to cheek kiss and hug, including the men. Argentines are a gregarious bunch, and they would rather sit ar ound until 4am with friends and drink *mate* tea than sit in silence in front of a TV. It is therefore not surprising that the most popular TV programs are chat shows.

The country's psyche is somewhat schizophrenic. D eep pride is counterbalanced b y strong self-doubt. Famous on the r est of the continent for being arr ogant and self-confident, Argentina 's brashness was some what sullied after the economic crisis in 2001. An identity crisis ensued where a period of navel gazing saw the nation's intellectuals wondering whether they w ere First World or Third World. Argentines will fr eely criticiz e the politicians they keep electing or the system they keep supporting but soon switch to the defensive if a foreigner offers a negative opinion. Such contradictions are evident in their attitude to the B ritish. Argentines act aggrieved regarding the Las M alvinas defeat, triumphant regarding football victories, and fawning regarding British culture, with ubiquitous pop on ev ery radio station and the middle class dr opping E nglish phrases at every opportunity.

Of course it is danger ous to generaliz e a whole race of people, especially when their characteristics differ gr eatly depending on class and location. The usual capital and provincial rivalry exists here just as anywhere else. Perhaps in Argentina it is a little mor e pronounced as B uenos Air es is o verpopulated and the v ast countr yside underpopulated. Those fr om the pr ovinces r egard Porteños as loud, brash, and untr ustworthy. The capital dw ellers feel less str ongly about their country cousins; but whatev er opinion they have, it is usually twinged with disdain and condescension. What they all hav e in common is love of family, food, and football; pride in their country's natural beauty; disregard for watches and all kno wn timepieces; and utter contempt for tax es. The famous footballer M aradona illustrates Argentina perfectly. D espite his many faults, he is like his country, loved by everybody.

5 ARGENTINA IN POPULAR CULTURE

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Fiction lo vers hav e a rich seam to mine regarding Argentine writing. J orge L uis Borges is the country's grandfather of literature, with his elegant shor t stories combining symbolism, fantasy, and reality to create metaphysical narrativ es that hav e been translated all over the world. *Labyrinths* and *A Universal History of Iniquity* are just two of his collections from a prolific career. Julio Cortázar is another giant of letters who, like Borges, was very much influenced by European ideas and lived abroad for many years in Paris. His novel *Hopscotch* has an unconventional narrativ e that r equires r eading twice to giv e two differ ent v ersions. H is story *The Droolings of the Devil* was adapted into the famous ar t-house movie *Blow Up*

by Michelangelo Antonioni. Another Borges-influenced writer is Ernesto Sábato, whose *On Heroes and Tombs* is one of the most thorough artistic expressions of Buenos Aires ever written. *The Tunnel,* by the same author, is a compelling read about an obsessed painter. Less lauded abroad but more indicative of Argentine rural life is the work of Horacio Quiroga. A tragic figure (he committed suicide in 1937), Quiroga's stories are mostly set in the jungle frontier of Misiones; they combine the supernatural and bizarre to create stories that are enjoyed by young and old alike and can be seen as a predecessor to magical realism. *The Decapitated Chicken* and *The Exiles* are both short story collections that are available in English. A seminal book in Argentine literature is the 19th-century gaucho poem *Martin Fierro,* by José Hernández, a compulsory read for all Argentine students.

Popular modern writers include Manuel Puig, whose *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was adapted into a movie of the same name. It deals with sex and repression using popular movies and cultural references to keep the narrative flowing. Puig's background as a screenwriter can also be seen in other books such as *Betrayed by Rita Hayworth* and *Heartbreak Tango.* Osvaldo Soriano's *Shadows* and *A Funny Dirty Little War* are popular critiques of Argentine society, while Federico Andahazi's *The Anatomist* is an entertaining and somewhat bawdy work of historical fiction.

For an outsider's take on Argentine culture, read *In Patagonia* by Bruce Chatwin, one of the most famous travelogues ever written. *Chasing Che* by Patrick Symmes is an eloquent description of the writer's attempt to retrace the road trip of the famous revolutionary. Miranda France's *Bad Times in Buenos Aires* is an excellent impression of an expat's frustrating attempt to live in Argentina. For something lighter and more frivolous, read *Kiss and Tango,* by Marina Palmer, the warts-and-all confessions of a tango-dancing *gringa.*

RECOMMENDED FILMS

Despite limited funding and very little exposure, the Argentine movie industry has a prodigious output, with movies veering from slick mainstream features to grim independent offerings and an occasional award-winning gem in between. Themes such as the breakdown of society, the dirty war, the Malvinas war, and the sex wars provide rich pickings for young creative directors with little money but lots of talent.

Maria Luisa Bemberg is probably the most famous of late-20th-century Argentine filmmakers and specialized in period dramas. Her *Camila* (1984) and *Miss Mary* (1986) both deal with the feminine experience in Argentina, with Julie Christie starring in the latter. *The Official Story* (1985), by Luis Puenzo, and *The Night of the Pencils* (1986), by Hector Olivera, are two powerful dramas about the military dictatorship and how the repression even reached the nation's children. *Man Facing Southeast* (1986) and The *Dark Side of the Heart* (1992) are two compelling movies by Eliseo Subiela, the former having a sci-fi theme and the latter an intriguing love story. The Italian neorealist style of filmmaking is a strong influence in Argentine cinema, and nowhere is it more evident than in the movies of Pablo Trapero. *Crane World* (1999) and *El Bonarense* (2002) are two gritty working-class features, with the former a stark portrait of police corruption. Another master of everyday themes and deadpan comedy is Carlos Sorin. *Historias Minimas* (2003) and *Bombon the Dog* (2004) deal with love, life, and dogs. For something more mainstream but just as hilarious, *Tiempo de Valientes* (2008), by Damian Szifron, concerns two favorite Argentine subject matters—crime and psychoanalysis. *Blessed by Fire* (2004), by Tristan Bauer, is possibly one of the best movies made about the Falklands War, while grifter movie *Nine Queens* (2001),

by Fabian Bielinsky, is so good that it was remade in Hollywood.

Unfortunately Hollywood's take on Argentina is not so illustrious and fraught with clichés. One of the first mainstream movies is a lighthearted musical called *Down Argentine Way* (1940), by Irving Cummings. Robert Duvall's *Assassination Tango* (2002) and Christopher Hampton's *Imagining Argentina* (2003) are uninspiring and best forgotten, and the less said about Alan Parker's *Evita* (1996) the better. The best foreign movies about Argentina are those that make the setting speak for itself—in most cases, the rich, atmospheric backdrop of Buenos Aires. Two great examples of this are *Happy Together* (1997), by Wong Kar Wai, and *Tango* (1998), by Carlos Saura.

6 EATING & DRINKING IN ARGENTINA

The recent renaissance in Argentine food has seen appetites move away slightly from the traditional beef, pasta, and pizza-based menu. Strong regional influences are coming to the fore, and the best restaurants are keen to offer local products in tune with the seasons. The Northwest is fond of indigenous recipes with a strong Spanish colonial tradition. *Locro* and *humita* are two maize-based broths often accompanied by tamales and empanadas stuffed with llama meat. In the wetlands of the northeast, the Guarani Indian tradition is evident in dishes made from *manioc,* pumpkin, and fruit such as papaya. The river lifestyle means excellent fish in the form of dorado, *surubí,* and *pejerrey.* Kid goat is popular in the central western provinces; Patagonian cuisine consists of wild boar, venison, and lamb; and plentiful trout and salmon caught fresh from the many rivers and king crab rule the dinner table in the far southern coastal areas such as Tierra del Fuego.

Despite such changes, there is no denying that beef remains the staple of every Argentine household and world-famous Argentine steak is top of every visitors list to try as soon as possible. Sidewalk restaurants and cafes have a multitude of meat-based snacks such as *milanesas* (filet in bread crumbs) and *lomitos* (steak sandwiches). The ultimate cow experience is the epic Argentine *asado,* something the translation "barbecue" does no justice to as there is not a hot dog or hamburger in sight. Instead you get a mouthwatering parade of every meat cut imaginable such as *costillas* (ribs) and *bife de chorizo* (tenderloin). Offal is popular in the form of *mollejas* (sweetbread) and *chimchullinis* (intestine). A weekend invitation to a family *asado* should not be missed, and as you travel around you will see such gatherings in the unlikeliest of places such as freeway curbs, street steps, and high-rise balconies. When Argentines want to celebrate, it is always with an *asado.* If such an invite is not forthcoming, settle for an *asado de tira* in any *parrilla* (grill-house restaurant), with the ubiquitous empanadas for starters.

Regarding drinks, *mate* tea is a national obsession, with groups consuming this bitter, green infusion on street corners, park benches, and even behind the car steering wheel. Service stations have machines dispensing free hot water to those who want to top up their thermos, which in turn tops up their *mate* gourds. Coffee is popular and served strong. Cafe culture is vibrant, with the prework caffeine lift and chat a prerequisite among many. For something different, try a *submarino*—a tall glass of hot milk dunked with a lump of dark chocolate (often in the shape of a submarine). Ice cream is indulged in at all hours, and many parlors remain open until the early morning serving a bewildering choice topped by the national pride *dulce de leche* (caramelized milk).

The Italian *digestif* Fernet has taken on a new life as the alcoholic drink of the young and is phenomenally popular in late-night bars and discos; its sweet cough-medicine taste is tamed with lots of cola and ice. Argentine wine is now some of the best in the world, with the powerful red Malbec from Mendoza the perfect companion with beef and the aromatic white Torrontes from Salta and La Rioja excellent with fish or pasta. Other wine varietals to look out for are the toast-flavored Bonarda and the rich and silky Tempranillo.

Argentine eating habits deserve a book in itself. Just be aware that dinner is late and most restaurants do not get busy until after 10pm.

3

Planning Your Trip to Argentina

To be prepared is always good advice. Though you cannot anticipate every problem that may occur on your holiday, a little advance planning can make the difference between a good trip and a great trip. This book should provide you with everything you need to know before you depart. Timing is important, as is the route you choose to get there. Determine your budget and take into account that many places do not accept credit cards and that ATMs set ridiculously low limits on withdrawals. There are also some health and safety precautions that should be taken. This chapter outlines all the basics—the when, why, and how of traveling to and around Argentina.

1 VISITOR INFORMATION

IN THE U.S. The Argentina Government Tourist Office has offices at 12 W. 56th St., New York, NY 10019 (✆ **212/603-0443;** fax 212/315-5545), and 2655 Le Jeune Rd., Penthouse Ste. F, Coral Gables, FL 33134 (✆ **305/442-1366;** fax 305/441-7029). For more details, consult Argentina's Ministry of Tourism website (see "Websites of Note," below).

IN CANADA Basic tourist information can be obtained by the Consulate General of Argentina, 2000 Peel St., Ste. 600, Montreal, Quebec H3A 2W5 (✆ **514/842-6582;** fax 514/842-5797; www.consargenmtl.com); for more details, consult Argentina's Ministry of Tourism website (see "Websites of Note," below).

IN THE U.K. For visitor information, contact the Embassy of Argentina in London (see "Entry Requirements & Customs," below) or consult Argentina's Ministry of Tourism website (see "Websites of Note," below).

IN BUENOS AIRES The central office of the **City Tourism Secretariat,** Calle Balcarce 360, in Monserrat (✆ **11/4313-0187;** www.turismo.gov.ar), is responsible for all visitor information on Buenos Aires but is not open to the general public. Instead, the city uses several kiosks spread throughout various neighborhoods, which have maps and hotel, restaurant, and attraction information. **Tourist Information Office,** Av. Santa Fe 883 (✆ **11/4312-2232**), is one of the best located as is the office located at the entrance to Retiro Terminal.

The **Buenos Aires City Tourism Office** runs an information hot line (✆ **11/4313-0187**) from 7:30am to 6pm Monday to Saturday, and Sunday 11am to 6pm.

WEBSITES OF NOTE

- **www.embassyofargentina.us**: Up-to-date travel information from the Argentine embassy in Washington, D.C.
- **www.turismo.gov.ar**: This Ministry of Tourism site has travel information for all of Argentina, including a virtual tour of the country's tourist regions, shopping tips, links to city tourist sites, and general travel facts.
- **www.mercotour.com**: A travel site focused on adventure and ecological

excursions, with information on outdoor activities in both Argentina and Chile.

- **www.allaboutar.com**: This well-written site is packed with practical information about the country, including skiing, golfing, and *estancia* (ranch) stays.
- **www.welcomepatagonia.com**: This fantastic website has extensive information about this region of Argentina, including hotels, itineraries, and other details.
- **www.welcomeargentina.com**: Great information about Argentina, and extensive details on things to do in Buenos Aires. Includes self-guided tour ideas, lists of hotels, and up-to-date information on restaurants and other trends.
- **www.bue.gov.ar**: A comprehensive tourism website set up by the city of Buenos Aires, with details on neighborhoods and a calendar of events in English and other languages. The website has lots of extremely detailed and useful information, but it can be cumbersome to work through its windows and pop-ups. Be patient with it.
- **www.wine-republic.com**: This is a lively, irreverent Mendoza-based website explaining Argentine culture and the best destinations, with the focus on good food and wine.
- **www.palermoviejo.com**: Find out what is going on in Buenos Aires's trendiest neighborhood, full of the newest restaurants, shops, and boutique hotels.
- **www.google.com.ar**: If you're good at Spanish, use this Argentina-based division of the popular Google search engine. Clicking on "Páginas de Argentina" will give you the most up-to-date, locally produced information.
- **www.subte.com.ar**: This website explains in detail the workings of the Buenos Aires subway system and allows you to locate hotels and other sites of interest in relation to subway stops. It also includes downloadable maps and an interactive feature that helps you to calculate travel times between destinations.

2 ENTRY REQUIREMENTS & CUSTOMS

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Citizens of the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and South Africa require a passport to enter the country. No visa is required for citizens of these countries for tourist stays of up to 90 days. For more information concerning longer stays, employment, or other types of visas, contact the embassies or consulates in your home country. Usually, a hop by boat into neighboring Uruguay or crossing into Brazil during an Iguazú Falls excursion will initiate a new 90-day tourist period. With the increasing number of Americans and other foreigners living in Argentina, this has become one of the preferred quick-fix methods of bypassing visa extension bureaucracy. If you are planning to buy property, retire, or establish a business in Argentina, it is highly advisable to take care of the proper paper work for your stay.

IN THE U.S. Contact the Consular Section of the Argentine Embassy, 1811 Q St. NW, Washington, DC 20009 (✆ **202/238-6400**). Consulates are also located in Los Angeles (✆ **323/954-9155** or -9156), Miami (✆ **305/580-0530**), Atlanta (✆ **404/880-0805**), Chicago (✆ **312/819-2610**), New York City (✆ **212/603-0400**), and Houston (✆ **713/871-8935**). For more information, try www.embassyofargentina.us, with links to various consulates in the U.S.

IN CANADA Contact the Embassy of the Argentine Republic, Ste. 910, Royal

Bank Center , 90 S parks S t., O ttawa, Ontario K1P 5B4 (✆ **613/236-2351;** fax 613/235-2659; embargentina@argentina-canada.net).

IN THE U.K. Contact the E mbassy of the Argentine Republic, 65 Brooke St., London W1Y 4AH (✆ **020/7318-1300;** fax 020/7318-1301; www .argentine-embassy-uk.org).

IN NE W ZEAL AND Contact the Embassy of the Argentine Republic, Prime Finance Tower, Lev el 14, 142 Lambton Quay, P.O. Box 5430, Wellington (✆ **04/472-8330;** fax 04/472-8331; www .arg.org.nz).

IN A USTRALIA Contact the E mbassy of the Argentine R epublic, John McEwen House, Lev el 2, 7 N ational Cir cuit, B arton, A CT 2600 (✆ **02/6273 9111;** fax 02/6273 0500; www.argentina.org.au).

CUSTOMS

What You Can Take into Argentina

Travelers entering Argentina can bring personal effects—including clothes, je welry, and pr ofessional equipment such as cameras and computers—without paying duty. In addition, they can bring in 21 liters of alcohol, 400 cigar ettes, and 50 cigars duty-free.

What You Can Take Home from Argentina

Returning **U.S. citiz ens** who hav e been away for at least 48 hours ar e allo wed to bring back, once ev ery 30 days, $800 worth of mer chandise duty-fr ee. You'll be charged a flat rate of duty on the next $1,000 wor th of pur chases. Any dollar amount bey ond that is dutiable at whatever rates apply. On mailed gifts, the duty-free limit is $200. H ave y our r eceipts handy to expedite the declaration pr ocess. ***Note:*** If you owe duty, you are required to pay on y our arriv al in the U nited S tates, either by cash, personal check, go vernment or traveler's check, or money or der, and in some locations, a Visa or MasterCard.

In Argentina, this is rar ely an issue unless y ou hav e a lot of electr onics. To avoid having to pay duty on for eign-made personal items y ou owned before y ou left on y our trip , bring along a bill of sale, insurance policy , je weler's appraisal, or receipts of pur chase. O r y ou can r egister items that can be r eadily identified b y a permanently affix ed serial number or marking—think laptop computers, cameras, and CD play ers—with C ustoms before y ou leav e. Take the items to the nearest C ustoms office or r egister them with C ustoms at the airpor t fr om which you're departing. You'll receive, at no cost, a Certificate of Registration, which allows duty-free entry for the life of the item.

You cannot bring fr esh fr uits and v egetables into the U nited States, with some exceptions. For specifics on what y ou can bring back, do wnload the inv aluable fr ee pamphlet, *Know Before You Go,* online at **www.cbp.gov**. (Click on " Travel," and then on "Kno w B efore You G o! O nline Brochure.") Or contact the **U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP),** 1300 Pennsylvania A ve. NW , Washington, DC 20229 (✆ **877/287-8667**), and r equest the pamphlet.

For **Canadian** rules, write for the booklet *I Declare,* issued by the **Canada Border Services A gency** (✆ **800/461-9999** in Canada or 204/983-3500; www .cbsa-asfc.gc.ca). Canada allo ws its citiz ens a C$750 exemption, and y ou're allo wed to bring back duty-free one carton of cigarettes, one can of tobacco, 40 imperial ounces of liquor, and 50 cigars. I n addition, y ou're allowed to mail gifts to Canada v alued at less than C$60 a day, provided they're unsolicited and don't contain alcohol or tobacco (write on the package "U nsolicited gift, under $60 value"). Declare all valuables on the Y-38 form befor e departure from Canada, including serial numbers of v aluables you already own, such as expensive foreign

cameras. ***Note:*** The C$750 exemption can only be used once a year and only after an absence of 7 days.

Citizens of the U.K. who are **returning from a non-E.U. country** have a Customs allowance of 200 cigarettes; 50 cigars; 250 grams of smoking tobacco; 2 liters of still table wine; 1 liter of spirits or strong liqueurs (over 22% volume); 2 liters of fortified wine, sparkling wine, or other liqueurs; 60 cubic centimeters (mL) of perfume; 250 cubic centimeters (mL) of toilet water; and £145 worth of all other goods, including gifts and souvenirs. People 16 and under cannot have the tobacco or alcohol allowance. For more information, contact HM Customs & Excise at ✆ **0845/010-9000** (from outside the U.K., 020/8929-0152), or consult their website at www.hmce.gov.uk.

The duty-free allowance in **Australia** is A$400 or, for those 17 and under, A$200. Citizens can bring in 250 cigarettes or 250 grams of loose tobacco, and 1,125 milliliters of alcohol. If you're returning with valuables you already own, such as foreign-made cameras, you should file form B263. A helpful brochure available from Australian consulates or Customs offices is *Know Before You Go.* For more information, call the **Australian Customs Service** (✆ **1300/363-263;** www.customs.gov.au).

The duty-free allowance for **New Zealand** is NZ$700. Citizens 18 and over can bring in 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco (or a mixture of all three if their combined weight doesn't exceed 250g); plus 4.5 liters of wine and beer, or 1.125 liters of liquor. New Zealand currency does not carry import or export restrictions. Fill out a certificate of export, listing the valuables you are taking out of the country; that way, you can bring them back without paying duty. Most questions are answered in a free pamphlet available at New Zealand consulates and Customs offices: *New Zealand Customs Guide for Travellers, Notice no. 4.* For more information, contact **New Zealand Customs,** The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (✆ **04/473-6099** or 0800/428-786; www.customs.govt.nz).

3 WHEN TO GO

The seasons in Argentina are the reverse of those in the Northern Hemisphere. Buenos Aires is ideal in fall (Mar–May) and spring (Sept–Nov), when temperatures are mild. The beaches and resort towns are packed with vacationing Argentines in summer (Dec–Mar), while Buenos Aires becomes somewhat deserted of locals, which is not a bad thing regarding traffic. Plan a trip to Patagonia and the southern Andes in summer, when days are longer and warmer. Winter (June–Aug) is the best time to visit Iguazú and the Northwest, when the rains and heat have subsided; but spring (Aug–Oct) is also pleasant, as temperatures are mild and the crowds have cleared out.

CLIMATE Except for a small tropical area in northern Argentina, the country lies in the Temperate Zone, characterized by cool, dry weather in the south and warmer, humid air in the center. Accordingly, January and February are quite hot—often in the high 90s to more than 100°F (35°C–40°C)—while winter (approximately July–Oct) can be chilly.

HOLIDAYS Public holidays are January 1 (New Year's Day), Good Friday, March 24 (Truth and Justice Day) May 1 (Labor Day), May 25 (First Argentine Government), June 10 (National Sovereignty Day), June 20 (Flag Day), July 9 (Independence Day), August 17 (Anniversary of the Death of General San Martín), October 12 (Día

de la Raza), December 8 (Immaculate Conception Day), and December 25 (Christmas). Christmas, however, is usually celebrated on December 24, and called Noche Buena. Many stores and other services close this day.

FESTIVALS & SPECIAL EVENTS Several holidays and festivals are worth planning a trip around; the best place to get information for these events is through your local Argentine tourism office (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter). **Carnaval (Mardi Gras),** the week before the start of Lent, is celebrated in many towns in Argentina, although to a much lesser extent than in neighboring Brazil. The main area for this is in Gualeguaychú, about 3 hours north of Buenos Aires in Entre Rios Province. In Salta, citizens throw a large parade, including caricatures of public officials and "water bomb" fights. The **Gaucho Parade** takes place in Salta on June 16, with music by folk artists and gauchos dressed in traditional red ponchos with black stripes, leather chaps, black boots, belts, and knives. For more gaucho madness, visit the city of San Antonio de Areco, about 1½ hours from Buenos Aires. **Día de la Tradición** is generally celebrated around November 10, when gauchos and the tourists who love them flock to the picturesque town.

Inti Raymi (Festival of the Sun) takes place in towns throughout the Northwest the night before the summer solstice (June 20) to give thanks for the year's harvest. **Día de Independencia (Independence Day)** is celebrated in Tucumán on July 9. **Exodo Jujeño (Jujuy Exodus)** takes place August 23 and 24, when locals reenact the exodus of 1812. The **Batalla de Tucumán (Battle of Tucumán)** celebrates Belgrano's victory over the Spanish on September 24. And the **Fiesta Provincial del Turismo (Provincial Tourist Festival)** takes place in December in Puerto Iguazú.

The Buenos Aires version of Carnaval, or Mardi Gras, is called **Fiesta de las Murgas,** and though it's not as colorful as Rio de Janeiro's or even the one in Gualeguaychú, it is celebrated every weekend in February. Various neighborhoods have costumed street-band competitions full of loud music, drums, and dancing. Contact the Buenos Aires tourism office (www.bue.gov.ar) for more information.

The **World Tango Festival** is celebrated in early to mid-October, with various events, many concentrated in the tango neighborhood of San Telmo. See www.worldtangofestival.com.ar for more information and exact dates.

The world's biggest polo event, the **Argentine Open Polo Championships,** is held in the polo grounds in Palermo, near the Las Cañitas neighborhood, generally in late November, attracting moneyed crowds from around the world who get to mingle with visiting British royalty. Visit their website, www.aapolo.com.

The **National Gay Pride** parade is held in November, and can switch at the last minute from the first Saturday to the third Saturday of the month, so check Comunidad Homosexual de Argentina's website, at www.cha.org.ar, for updated information.

Some big regional parties include **Octoberfest,** in Villa Belgrano, Córdoba, every second weekend of October and **Mendoza Wine Harvest Festival** every first weekend in March.

Though Argentina has little in the way of Christmas ritual, **midnight Mass on Christmas Eve (Noche Buena),** at the Metropolitan Cathedral, is a beautiful spectacle. It is usually held at 10pm on December 24.

4 GETTING THERE

BY PLANE

Argentina's main international airport is **Ezeiza Ministro Pistarini** (EZE; ✆ **11/4480-9538**), located 42km (26 miles) to the west of Buenos Aires. Allot at least 45 minutes to an hour for travel between the airport and the city, more in rush hour. You will be assessed a departure tax of approximately $24 upon leaving the country, payable in pesos, dollars, or by Visa credit card. For flights from Buenos Aires to Montevideo (in Uruguay), the departure tax is $5. Passengers in transit and children 1 and under are exempt from this tax. However, visitors are advised to verify the departure tax with their airline or travel agent, as the exact amount changes frequently.

Below are the major airlines that fly into Argentina from North America, Europe, and Australia. Argentina's national airline is **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (✆ **800/333-0276** in the U.S., 0810/222-86527 in Buenos Aires, or 1800/22-22-15 in Australia; www.aerolineas.com.ar). The airline flies a few times a week from New York and daily from Miami. Aerolíneas Argentinas is an interesting introduction to the excitement of Argentina and its culture. The female flight attendants tend to be particularly glamorous, and the staff, mostly natives of Argentina, can offer excellent advice for you to use once you are on the ground. Argentine wine is free and liberally served in coach and all classes. Renationalized in 2008, it is uncertain if the company will retain its reputation for strikes, delays and general inefficiency, especially on domestic flights.

Other operators include **American Airlines** (✆ 800/433-7300 in the U.S., or 11/4318-1111 in Buenos Aires; www.aa.com); **United Airlines** (✆ 800/241-6522 in the U.S., or 0810/777-8648 in Buenos Aires; www.united.com); **Air Canada** (✆ 888/247-2262 in Canada, or 11/4327-3640 in Buenos Aires; www.aircanada.com); **British Airways** (✆ 0845/773-3377 in the U.K., or 11/4320-6600 in Buenos Aires; www.britishairways.com); and **Iberia** (✆ 0845/601-2854 in the U.K., or 11/4131-1000 in Buenos Aires; www.iberia.com). **LAN** (✆ 866/435-9526 in the U.S. and Canada, or 11/4378-2222 in Buenos Aires; http://plane.lan.com) also provides connections from Miami and New York, both direct and through Santiago to Buenos Aires. **Qantas Airlines,** of Australia (✆ 13-13-13 in Australia, or 11/4514-4730 in Buenos Aires; www.qantas.com.au), now has service from Sydney to Santiago, with shared service continuing to Buenos Aires on LAN.

Domestic airlines and flights to Uruguay use **Jorge Newbery Airport** (✆ **11/4514-1515**), located only 15 minutes to the north, along the river from downtown.

The easiest way to travel Argentina's vast distances is by air, though flights are expensive and foreigners are charged substantially more than locals. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (see above) connects most cities and tourist destinations in Argentina, including Córdoba, Jujuy, Iguazú, Salta, and the beach resorts. **LAN** (✆ **866/435-9526** in the U.S. and Canada, or 11/4378-2222 in Buenos Aires; http://plane.lan.com) flies to Córdoba, Mendoza, and Iguazú.

BY BUS

The **Estación Terminal de Omnibus,** Av. Ramos Mejía 1680 (✆ **11/4310-0700**), located near Retiro Station, serves all long-distance buses. You would use this station when connecting to other parts of Argentina, or by long-distance coach from other countries. Due to the high cost of air

transport for most South Americans, the continent is served by numerous companies offering comfortable, and at times luxurious, bus services to other capitals, often overnight. This is ideal for student and budget travelers.

Among the major bus companies that operate out of Buenos Aires are **La Veloz del Norte** (✆ **11/4315-2482**), serving destinations in the Northwest, including Salta and Jujuy; **Singer** (✆ **11/4315-2653**), serving Puerto Iguazú as well as Brazilian destinations; and **T.A. Chevallier** (✆ **11/4313-3297**), serving points throughout the country.

The **Estación Terminal de Omnibus,** sometimes referred to as the Retiro Bus Station, is sprawling, enormous, and confusing. Just walking from one end to another takes about 15 minutes, given the ramps, crowds, and stairs you have to maneuver through. Routes and platform locations rarely make it to the overhead boards also, so don't rely on them. Still, in spite of the chaos, there is an overarching order. A color-coded system used at the ticket counters explains in general which destinations of the country are served by which bus lines. Red, for instance, indicates the center of the country, including the province of Buenos Aires; dark blue, the south; orange, the north; green, the northeast; light blue, the central Atlantic coast; and gray, the international destinations. However, at their sales counters, many bus companies indicate names of cities on their destination lists that they no longer serve, so you may have to stand in a line to ask. Many companies also have more than one name, adding to the visual clutter at the ticket counters. To help you make sense of it all, use **www.tebasa.com.ar**, the terminal's website, while planning your trip. Click on the province where you are traveling, and a list of bus companies and phone numbers will come up. Bus tickets can also be purchased at most travel agencies. This can cost slightly more but can save a lot of confusion if you're short on time.

BY CAR

In Buenos Aires, travel by *subte* (subway) or *remises* (radio-dispatched taxis, as opposed to street taxis) is easier and safer than driving yourself. Rush-hour traffic is chaotic, and parking is difficult. If you have rented a car for whatever reason, park it at your hotel or a nearby garage and leave it there. Most daily parking charges do not exceed $4 or $5 (£2.75–£3.40). Many recently built hotels have parking on the premises; others use nearby garages.

If you're traveling outside of Buenos Aires, it's another story when it comes to having a car. Argentine roads and highways are generally in good condition, with the exception of some rural areas. Most highways have been privatized and charge nominal tolls. In Buenos Aires, drivers are aggressive and don't always obey traffic lanes or lights. Wear your seat belt, as required by Argentine law. U.S. driver's licenses are valid in greater Buenos Aires, but you need an Argentine or international license to drive in most other parts of the country. Fuel (known as NAFTA) is expensive, at about $1 (70p) per liter (or $4/£2.80 per gallon).

The **Automóvil Club Argentino (ACA),** Av. del Libertador 1850 (✆ **11/4802-6061**), has working arrangements with international automobile clubs. The ACA offers numerous services, including roadside assistance, road maps, hotel and camping information, and discounts for various tourist activities.

CAR RENTALS Many international car-rental companies operate in Argentina, with offices at airports and in city centers. The main offices in Buenos Aires for the following agencies are **Hertz,** Paraguay 1122 (✆ **800/654-3131** in the U.S., or 11/4816-8001 in Buenos Aires); **Avis,** Cerrito 1527 (✆ **800/230-4898** in the

U.S., or 11/4300-8201 in Buenos Aires); **Dollar,** Marcelo T. de Alvear 523 (✆ **800/800-6000** in the U.S., or 11/4315-8800 in Buenos Aires); and **Thrifty,** Av. Leandro N. Alem 699 (✆ **800/847-4389** in the U.S., or 11/4315-0777 in Buenos Aires). Car rental is expensive in Argentina, with standard rates beginning at about $50 to $60 (£34–£41) per day for a subcompact with unlimited mileage (ask for any special promotions, especially on weekly rates). Check to see if your existing automobile insurance policy (or a credit card) covers insurance for car rentals.

5 MONEY & COSTS

CASH & CURRENCY

The official Argentine currency is the **peso,** made up of 100 **centavos.** Money is denominated in notes of 2, 5, 10, 20, 50, and 100 pesos; and coins of 1, 2, and 5 pesos, and 1, 5, 10, 25, and 50 centavos. At the time this book went to press, the exchange rate was 3.45 pesos to the dollar.

Argentina is not the bargain destination it was post-crisis 2001. Twenty per cent inflation in 2008 means prices have risen significantly, but it is still relatively cheap regarding dining out and shopping. High-end hotels have returned to their pre-devaluation prices, but you can still get some great rates, especially at the mid-range and budget options. A surge in hotel construction and a strengthening dollar should mean prices stabilize and even drop slightly.

EXCHANGING MONEY

It's a good idea to exchange at least some money—just enough to cover airport incidentals and transportation to your hotel—before you leave home (though don't expect the exchange rate to be ideal), so you can avoid lines at airport ATMs (automated teller machines). You can exchange money at your local American Express or Thomas Cook office or your bank. If you're far away from a bank with currency-exchange services, American Express offers traveler's checks and foreign currency, though with a $15 order fee and additional shipping costs, at www.americanexpress.com or ✆ **800/807-6233.**

U.S. dollars are not widely accepted in Buenos Aires. However, you can still use them to pay in some business-class hotels, tourist-popular restaurants, and businesses catering to large numbers of tourists. Such places will often post their own daily exchange rate at the counter, which is always significantly lower. For the vast majority of your purchases, however, you will need pesos. You can convert your currency in hotels, *casas de cambio* (money-exchange houses), some banks, and at the Buenos Aires airport. Exchange American Express traveler's checks for pesos in Buenos Aires at **American Express,** Arenales 707 (✆ **11/4130-3135**). It is sometimes difficult to exchange traveler's checks outside the center of Buenos Aires, so plan ahead to have a sufficient amount of cash in pesos on day trips.

ATMS

ATMs are maddening in Argentina, as they allow only ridiculously low withdrawals of $100—though you can withdraw several times in 1 day and rack up substantial bank charges. It is best to plan ahead, if you know you need large amounts of cash; or you might test various cash machines, as some will allow $200 and $300 limits. Machines are ubiquitous in Buenos Aires and other urban and touristic areas, but don't depend on finding them off the beaten path. It is a good idea to let your bank know ahead of time that you will be using your ATM card overseas so that they do not block transactions in an effort to prevent fraudulent transactions.

The **Cirrus** (✆ **800/424-7787;** www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS** (✆ **800/843-7587;** www.visa.com) networks span the globe; look at the back of your bank card to see which network you're on, and then call or check online for ATM locations at your destination. Be sure you know your personal identification number (PIN) before you leave home and be sure to find out your daily withdrawal limit before you depart, though this is slightly irrelevant if the Argentine network imposes its own limits. Also keep in mind that many banks impose a fee every time a card is used at a different bank's ATM, and that fee can be higher for international transactions (up to $5 or more) than for domestic ones. On top of this, the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee. To compare banks' ATM fees within the U.S., use **www.bankrate.com**. For international withdrawal fees, ask your bank.

TRAVELER'S CHECKS

Traveler's checks are something of an anachronism from the days before the ATM made cash accessible at any time. Within the Pampas and rural areas of Buenos Aires Province, however, they're still welcomed by many establishments.

You can get traveler's checks at almost any bank. **American Express** offers denominations of $20, $50, $100, $500, and (for cardholders only) $1,000. You'll pay a service charge ranging from 1% to 4%. You can also get American Express traveler's checks over the phone by calling ✆ **800/221-7282;** Amex gold and platinum cardholders who use this number are exempt from the 1% fee.

Visa offers traveler's checks at Citibank locations nationwide, as well as at several other banks. The service charge ranges between 1.5% and 2%; checks come in denominations of $20, $50, $100, $500, and $1,000. Call ✆ **800/732-1322** for information. AAA members can obtain Visa checks for a $9.95 fee (for checks up to $1,500) at most AAA offices or by calling ✆ **866/339-3378. MasterCard** also offers traveler's checks. Call ✆ **800/223-9920** for a location near you.

Foreign-currency traveler's checks are useful if you're traveling to one country; they're accepted at locations, such as bed-and-breakfasts, where dollar checks may not be, and they minimize the amount of math you have to do at your destination. **American Express, Thomas Cook, Visa,** and **MasterCard** offer foreign-currency traveler's checks. You'll pay the rate of exchange at the time of your purchase (so it's a good idea to monitor the rate before you take the plunge), and most companies charge a transaction fee per order (and a shipping fee if you order online).

If you choose to carry traveler's checks, be sure to keep a record of their serial numbers separate from your checks, in the event that they are stolen or lost. You'll get a refund faster if you know the numbers.

CREDIT CARDS

Visa, American Express, MasterCard, and Diners Club are commonly accepted. However some establishments—especially smaller businesses—will give you a better price if you pay cash or may refuse credit cards altogether. Credit cards are accepted at most hotels and the more expensive restaurants. But note that you cannot use credit cards in many taxis or at most attractions (museums, trams, and so on). Like ATM cards, many credit card companies are also now applying fees to international transactions, often as high as 3%. If you have more than one credit card and expect to charge a lot, call the credit card companies before you leave on your trip to find out which charges the lowest, if any, fee. Using the wrong card can make a bargain not such a bargain anymore.

You can get **cash advances** off your credit card at any bank, and you don't even need to go to a teller; you can get a cash advance at the ATM if you know your

PIN. If you've forgotten your PIN, or didn't even know you had one, call the phone number on the back of your credit card before your trip and ask the bank to send it to you. It usually takes 5 to 7 business days, although some banks will do it over the phone.

Another hidden expense to contend with: Interest rates for cash advances are often significantly higher than rates for credit card purchases. More importantly, you start paying interest on the advance *the moment you receive the cash.*

6 TRAVEL INSURANCE

Check your existing insurance policies and credit card coverage before you buy travel insurance. You may already be covered for lost luggage, canceled tickets, or medical expenses.

The cost of travel insurance varies widely, depending on the cost and length of your trip, your age and health, and the type of trip you're taking, but expect to pay between 5% and 8% of the vacation itself.

TRIP-CANCELLATION INSURANCE Trip-cancellation insurance helps you get your money back if you have to back out of a trip, if you have to go home early, or if your travel supplier goes bankrupt. Allowed reasons for cancellation can range from sickness to natural disasters to the Department of State declaring your destination unsafe for travel. (Insurers usually won't cover vague fears, though, as many travelers discovered who tried to cancel their trips in Oct 2001 because they were wary of flying.) In this unstable world, trip-cancellation insurance is a good buy if you're getting tickets well in advance—who knows what the state of the world, or of your airline, will be in 9 months? Insurance policy details vary, so read the fine print and make sure that your airline or cruise line is on the list of carriers covered in case of bankruptcy. A good resource is **"Travel Guard Alerts,"** a service that provides a list of companies considered high-risk by Travel Guard International (see website below). Protect yourself further by paying for the insurance with a credit card—by law, consumers can get their money back on goods and services not received, if they report the loss within 60 days after the charge is listed on their credit card statement.

For more information, contact one of the following recommended insurers: **Access America** (✆ 866/807-3982; www.accessamerica.com); **Travel Guard International** (✆ 800/826-4919; www.travelguard.com); **Travel Insured International** (✆ 800/243-3174; www.travelinsured.com); and **Travelex Insurance Services** (✆ 888/457-4602; www.travelex-insurance.com).

MEDICAL INSURANCE For travel overseas, most health plans (including Medicare and Medicaid) do not provide coverage, and the ones that do often require you to pay for services upfront and reimburse you only after you return home. Even if your plan does cover overseas treatment, most out-of-country hospitals make you pay your bills upfront, and send you a refund only after you've returned home and filed the necessary paper work with your insurance company. As a safety net, you may want to buy travel medical insurance. If you require additional medical insurance, try **MEDEX Assistance** (✆ **410/453-6300;** www.medexassist.com) or **Travel Assistance International** (✆ **800/821-2828;** www.travelassistance.com; for general information on services, call the company's Worldwide Assistance Services, Inc., at ✆ **800/777-8710**).

LOST-LUGGAGE INSURANCE On domestic flights, checked baggage is covered up to $2,500 per ticketed passenger. On international flights (including U.S. portions of international trips), baggage coverage is limited to approximately $9.07 per pound, up to approximately $635 per checked bag. If you plan to check items more valuable than the standard liability, see if your valuables are covered by your homeowner's policy, get baggage insurance as part of your comprehensive travel-insurance package, or buy Travel Guard's "BagTrak" product. Don't buy insurance at the airport, as it's usually overpriced. Be sure to take any valuables or irreplaceable items with you in your carry-on luggage, as many valuables (including books, money, and electronics) aren't covered by airline policies.

If your luggage is lost, immediately file a lost-luggage claim at the airport, detailing the luggage contents. For most airlines, you must report delayed, damaged, or lost baggage within 4 hours of arrival. The airlines are required to deliver luggage, once found, directly to your house or destination free of charge.

7 HEALTH & SAFETY

STAYING HEALTHY

Argentina requires no vaccinations to enter the country, except for passengers coming from countries where cholera and yellow fever are endemic.

Some people who have allergies can be affected by the **pollution** in Buenos Aires's crowded MicroCentro, where cars and buses remain mired in traffic jams, belching out pollution. The beautiful spring blossoms also bring with them **pollen,** and even people not usually affected by plants might be thrown off seasonally and by species of plants different from those in North America and Europe. It's a good idea to pack a decongestant with you, or asthma medicine if you require it. With the new anti-smoking laws, you will not find indoor smoke to be the hazard it once was.

Because motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of injury among travelers, walk and drive defensively. Do not expect buses and taxis to stop for you when crossing the street. Always use a seat belt, which has now become the law in Buenos Aires, even in taxis.

Most visitors find that Argentine food and water are generally easy on the stomach. Water and ice are considered safe to drink in Buenos Aires. You should avoid street food and drinks served out of canisters by roving salespeople at the ubiquitous festivals all over the city. Vegetarians should take note that food that seems vegetarian often is not. With all those cows slaughtered for meat, there's plenty of cow fat finding its way as cooking oil for bread and biscuits. Read ingredients carefully and ask if in doubt.

Buenos Aires's streets and sidewalks can be disgustingly unsanitary. While there is a pooper-scooper law on the books, dog owners seem to take delight in letting their pets relieve themselves in the middle of the sidewalk. The rule of thumb also seems to be the better the neighborhood, the more poop there is, making Recoleta an obstacle course. Watch your step!

DRUGS & PRESCRIPTIONS Many drugs requiring a prescription in the United States do not necessarily need one in Argentina. Hence, if you lose or run out of a medicine, it might not be necessary to schedule a doctor's appointment to get your prescription. The same goes if you become ill and are sure you know what you need. Many of the pharmacies in the MicroCentro have staff members who

speak English. Not all medicines, however, are a bargain in Argentina.

AUSTRAL SUN The summer sun is hot and strong in Buenos Aires. It's best to bring sunblock, though it is available in stores and pharmacies throughout the city. There are no beaches within the city proper, but many people go tanning in the Palermo and Recoleta parks or in the Ecological Preserve.

MALARIA & OTHER TROPICAL AILMENTS Malaria is not an issue in most of Argentina. However, the humid summer months of January and February mean you will sometimes find swarms of mosquitoes wherever you go. Bring repellent to avoid bites. To get shots or advice for various illnesses if you are traveling from Buenos Aires to the jungle for long periods of time, contact **Vacunar,** a chain of clinics specializing in vaccinations and preventing illness, with locations all over Buenos Aires (www.vacunar.com.ar). Keep in mind that many shots require a period of time before they become effective. They will also explain, country by country, what is required if you are traveling to other parts of South America.

What to Do If You Get Sick away from Home

Any foreign consulate can provide a list of area doctors who speak English. If you get sick, consider asking your hotel concierge to recommend a local doctor—even his or her own. You can also try the emergency room at a local hospital. Many hospitals also have walk-in clinics for emergency cases that are not life-threatening; you may not get immediate attention, but you won't pay the high price of an emergency room visit.

If you suffer from a chronic illness, consult your doctor before your departure. For such conditions as epilepsy, diabetes, or hearing problems, wear a **MedicAlert identification tag** (✆ **888/633-4298;** www.medicalert.org), which will immediately alert doctors to your condition and give them access to your records through MedicAlert's 24-hour hotline.

The medical facilities and personnel in Buenos Aires and other urban areas in Argentina are very professional. Argentina has a system of socialized medicine, where basic services are free and doctors are well trained, but the facilities are poorly maintained due to lack of funding. There are many private clinics in every city, and they are inexpensive by Western standards. For an English-speaking hospital, call the **Hospital Británico** (✆ **11/4304-1081**), established over 150 years ago during the British Empire's hey day. If you worry about getting sick away from home, you may want to consider **medical travel insurance** (see the section on travel insurance above). In most cases, however, your existing health plan will provide all the coverage you need, but call to make sure. Be sure to carry your identification card in your wallet. You should also ask for receipts or notes from the doctors, which you might need for your claim.

SAFETY

Petty crime has increased significantly in Buenos Aires and other cities as a result of Argentina's economic crisis. Travelers should be especially alert to pickpockets and purse snatchers on the streets and on buses and trains. Tourists should take care not to be overly conspicuous, walking in pairs or groups when possible. Never walk around with your passport, as to lose it is a major headache. In Buenos Aires, do not take taxis off the street. You should call for a radio-taxi instead. Take similar precautions when traveling in Argentina's other big cities.

8 SPECIALIZED TRAVEL RESOURCES

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Buenos Aires is not a very accessible destination for travelers with disabilities. Four- and five-star hotels in Buenos Aires often have a few rooms designed for travelers with disabilities—check with the hotel in advance, and ask specific questions. Some hotels claim to be equipped for those with disabilities but still have one or two stairs leading to their elevator bays, making wheelchair access impossible. American-owned chains tend to be better at accessibility. Hotels with recent renovations sometimes will also have a room with limited capabilities and pull bars in the bathrooms. The tiny crowded streets of the MicroCentro can often barely accommodate two people walking together, let alone a wheelchair, and sidewalk cutouts do not exist in all areas. Fortunately, there are several organizations that can help.

Many travel agencies offer customized tours and itineraries for travelers with disabilities. **Flying Wheels Travel** (✆ **507/451-5005;** www.flyingwheelstravel.com) offers escorted tours and cruises that emphasize sports and private tours in minivans with lifts. **Access-Able Travel Source** (✆ **303/232-2979;** www.access-able.com) offers extensive access information and advice for traveling around the world with disabilities. **Accessible Journeys** (✆ **800/846-4537** or 610/521-0339; www.disabilitytravel.com) caters specifically to slow walkers and wheelchair travelers and their families and friends.

Organizations that offer assistance to travelers with disabilities include **Moss Rehab** (www.mossresourcenet.org), which provides a library of accessible-travel resources online; **SATH** (Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality; ✆ **212/447-7284;** www.sath.org; annual membership fees: $45 adults, $30 seniors and students), which offers a wealth of travel resources for all types of disabilities and informed recommendations on destinations, access guides, travel agents, tour operators, vehicle rentals, and companion services; and the **American Foundation for the Blind** (**AFB;** ✆ **800/232-5463;** www.afb.org), a referral resource for the blind or visually impaired that includes information on traveling with Seeing Eye dogs.

For more information specifically targeted to travelers with disabilities, check out the quarterly magazine ***Emerging Horizons*** ($16.95 per year, $21.95/£15 outside the U.S.; www.emerginghorizons.com).

SENIOR TRAVEL

Argentines treat seniors with great respect, making travel for them easy. The Argentine term for a senior or retired person is *jubilado* or *jubilada.* There are often discounts at theaters and museums, too, or even free admission. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (✆ **800/333-0276** in the U.S.; www.aerolineas.com.ar) offers a 10% discount on fares to Buenos Aires from Miami and New York for passengers 62 and older; companion fares are also discounted.

Members of **AARP** (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons), 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (✆ **888/687-2277;** www.aarp.org), get discounts on hotels, air fares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including *AARP The Magazine* and a monthly newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

The **Alliance for Retired Americans,** 8403 Colesville Rd., Ste. 1200, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (✆ **301/578-8422;** www.retiredamericans.org), offers a newsletter six times a year and discounts on hotel and auto rentals; annual dues are $10 per person or couple. ***Note:*** Members

of the former National Council of Senior Citizens receive automatic membership in the Alliance.

Many reliable agencies and organizations target the 50-plus market. **Elderhostel** (✆ **877/426-8056;** www.elderhostel.org) arranges study programs for those ages 55 and over (and a spouse or companion of any age) in the U.S. and in more than 80 countries around the world. Most courses last 5 to 7 days in the U.S. (2–4 weeks abroad), and many include airfare, accommodations in university dormitories or modest inns, meals, and tuition. **ElderTreks** (✆ **800/741-7956;** www.eldertreks.com) offers small-group tours to off-the-beaten-path or adventure-travel locations, restricted to travelers 50 and older. Recommended publications offering travel resources and discounts for seniors include the quarterly magazine ***Travel 50 & Beyond*** (www.travel50andbeyond.com); ***Travel Unlimited: Uncommon Adventures for the Mature Traveler*** (Avalon); ***101 Tips for Mature Travelers,*** available from Grand Circle Travel (✆ **800/221-2610** or 617/350-7500; www.gct.com); and ***Unbelievably Good Deals and Great Adventures That You Absolutely Can't Get Unless You're Over 50*** (McGraw-Hill), by Joann Rattner Heilman.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Though much has recently changed, Argentina remains a very traditional, Catholic society that is fairly closed-minded about homosexuality. Buenos Aires, however, is a more liberal exception to this rule, where gays and lesbians are part of the fabric of city life. Gay and lesbian travelers will find numerous clubs, restaurants, and even tango salons catering to them. Buenos Aires has become a major gay-tourism mecca since the peso crisis, outshining Rio de Janeiro in popularity for this market. Gay maps are now produced by the Buenos Aires Tourism Office for distribution with standard travel information. Most hotel concierges also easily provide this information, recognizing the importance of the emerging market. The locally produced website www.gayinbuenosaires.com.ar also provides more details on many sites of interest.

In 2003, Buenos Aires enacted a Civil Unions law for gay and lesbian couples—the first major Latin American city to do so—and this law may eventually be made national. Still, throughout Argentina, while there are visible venues and efforts, for the most part many gays and lesbians remain fairly closeted. Violence is sometimes aimed at the transgendered, even by police.

Be aware of a few rules of thumb in a country where close contact is perfectly normal. Women walk hand in hand on the street, and it does not necessarily mean they are lesbians. It's simply common among women. Men kiss each other hello in public, and again this does not mean they are gay.

The **International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association** (**IGLTA;** ✆ **800/448-8550** or 954/776-2626; www.iglta.org) is the trade association for the gay and lesbian travel industry, and offers an online directory of gay- and lesbian-friendly travel businesses.

The **Comunidad Homosexual de Argentina** (**CHA;** ✆ **11/4361-6382;** www.cha.org.ar) is the main gay- and lesbian-rights group in Argentina. They were the main proponents of the Civil Unions law, which they are attempting to expand to the entire country. They also run the annual Gay Pride March, known as Marcha del Orgullo Gay, in November.

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries specifically for gay and lesbian travelers. **Above and Beyond Tours** (✆ **800/397-2681;** www.abovebeyondtours.com) is the exclusive gay and lesbian tour operator for United Airlines. **Olivia Cruises & Resorts** (✆ **800/631-6277;** www.olivia.com) charters entire resorts and ships for

exclusive lesbian v acations and offers smaller group experiences for both gay and lesbian travelers.

Pride Travel (✆ **11/5218-6556;** www.pride-travel.com) is an Argentina-based company specializing in inbound B uenos Aires trav el and other trips thr oughout South America. They also r un the local gay guide publication ***La R onda*** and started Argentina's first gay trav el magazine, ***Pride T ravel,*** in 2005. **BueGay Travel** (✆ **11/4184-8290;** www .buegay.com.ar) handles upscale gay tourism within B uenos Air es and other par ts of Argentina. **Viajeras Travel** (✆ **11/4328-1857;** www.viajeras.net) is a woman-r un travel company , specializing in trav el for lesbian visitors to B uenos Air es. The women's scene is harder to tap than the men's scene, so this is a v ery useful resource.

Since 1992, **Gay.com T ravel** and its predecessor **Out and About** (✆ **800/929-2268;** www.outandabout.com) hav e pr o-vided gay and lesbian trav elers with objective, timely, and tr ustworthy co verage of gay-o wned and gay-friendly lodging, dining, sightseeing, nightlife, and shopping establishments in ev ery impor tant destina-tion worldwide. ***Out Traveler*** (✆ **800/792-2760;** www.outtraveler.com) is a gay travel magazine published b y LP I M edia, the owners of the U.S. gay ne wsmagazine the ***Advocate. S partacus I nternational G ay Guide*** (B runo Gmünder Verlag; www . spartacusworld.com/gayguide) and ***Odys-seus*** (Odysseus Enterprises Ltd.) are good, annual E nglish-language guidebooks focused on gay men, with some informa-tion for lesbians. You can get them fr om most gay and lesbian bookstor es, or or der them fr om **Giovanni's R oom** bookstor e, 1145 P ine S t., P hiladelphia, P A 19107 (✆ **215/923-2960;** www.giovannisroom.com). Within B uenos Air es, the gay monthly magazine ***Imperio*** is av ailable at central newspaper kiosks.

WOMEN TRAVELERS

Despite a female pr esident, Argentina remains at hear t a sexist countr y. There is a glass ceiling for women in many corpo-rations, and female beauty is highly ideal-ized abo ve all other traits. M en ar e extremely flirtatious, and leering looks ar e common, o wing perhaps to the str ong Italian influence in the countr y. While disconcerting, any looks and calls y ou might get ar e rar ely mor e than that. Drunk men in clubs can sometimes be physically harassing, ho wever. If you seek to av oid unwanted attention, don 't dr ess skimpily (as many P orteñas, or B uenos Aires natives, do). Women should be cau-tious when walking alone at night and should take radio-taxis, kno wn as *remises,* after dark.

In the rar e and unlikely ev ent of an assault or sexual attack, contact the police immediately. M ore help can also be received fr om the **Centro de E ncuentros Cultura y M ujer (CECYM),** G uatemala 4294 (✆ **11/4865-9102;** www .cecym.org.ar). It combats sexual violence against women, but not all of the staff members speak English.

Check out the awar d-winning w ebsite **Journeywoman** (www .journeywoman.com), a "real-life" women's travel informa-tion network where you can sign up for a free e-mail ne wsletter and get advice on everything fr om etiquette and dr ess to safety; or the trav el guide ***Safety and Security for W omen Who T ravel,*** by Sheila S wan and P eter Laufer (Travelers' Tales, I nc.), offering common-sense tips on safe travel.

KIDS & TEENS

Argentines love and pamper their children in ev ery way possible. Argentine kids ar e also trained fr om an early age to stay up late like their par ents. D on't be surprised to find y ourself passing a playgr ound full of kids and their parents on the swing sets

at 2am, when you're trying to find your way back to your hotel.

Many hotels have programs for children, especially around the holidays. Most will also provide babysitting, as long as it is requested in advance.

STUDENT TRAVELERS

Student discounts are very common in Argentina, but usually only if one has appropriate ID. **STA Travel** (✆ **800/781-4040** in the U.S., 020/7361-6144 in the U.K., or 1300/360-960 in Australia; www.statravel.com) specializes in affordable airfares, bus and rail passes, accommodations, insurance, tours, and packages for students and young travelers, and issues the **International Student Identity Card (ISIC).** This is the most widely recognized proof that you really are a student. As well as getting you discounts on a huge range of travel, tours, and attractions, it comes with a 24-hour emergency help line and a global voice/fax/e-mail messaging system with discounted international telephone calls. Available to any full-time student age 13 and over, it costs $22.

Argentina is great for college students on vacation and on a budget. The legal drinking age in Argentina is 18. There are places to drink and socialize all over Argentina. Within Buenos Aires, the bars around Plaza Serrano (see chapter 5) in Palermo Soho offer inexpensive beers on tap and pitchers of sangria. This is often served up with inexpensive snacks and live music, meaning having fun won't break a student budget. Córdoba is another city notable for its sizeable student population, with a wealth of pubs and clubs. Bariloche in the Lake District attracts thousands of Argentine students in the winter and summer looking for a good time.

9 ESCORTED GENERAL-INTEREST TOURS

These days, so many people plan their trips via websites and e-mail that it's easy to forget that a computer can never replace the knowledge of a good travel agent.

RECOMMENDED U.S.-BASED OPERATORS The following U.S.-based tour companies offer solid, well-organized tours in various price categories, and they are backed by years of experience. All can arrange tours of Buenos Aires, the surroundings, and other parts of Argentina and South America.

- **Borello Travel & Tours,** 7 Park Ave., Ste. 21, New York, NY 10016 (✆ **800/405-3072** or 212/695-3200; www.borellotravel.com), is a New York–based travel firm specializing in upscale travel to South America. The owner, Sandra Borello, has run her company for nearly 20 years and is a native of Buenos Aires. Prices can vary, depending on the season, options, and hotel, but a 1-week package to Buenos Aires can cost about $3,000 per person. They maintain an additional office in Buenos Aires, which can be reached at ✆ **11/5031-1988.**
- **Travel Dynamics International,** 132 E. 70th St., New York, NY 10021 (✆ **800/257-5767** or 212/517-0076; www.traveldynamicsinternational.com), is a luxury cruise operator that specializes in educational enrichment programs aboard small cruise ships. TDI voyages include expert guided land tours and onboard lectures by distinguished scholars and guests. They cater to the traveler with an intellectual interest in history, culture, and nature. Operating for almost 40 years, this company offers voyages with destinations in South America and Antarctica. Their journeys to Antarctica usually open with an overnight stay in Buenos Aires, and begin at $8,995 for a 14-day program (prices may vary).

RECOMMENDED BUENOS AIRES–BASED OPERATORS Even if you have arranged things at home, once you're in Buenos Aires, there are always last-minute changes or new things you would like to see. The following companies are all excellent and have English-speaking staff members. All can also provide trips to other cities in Argentina outside of Buenos Aires, as well as South America.

- **Say Hueque Tourism,** Viamonte 749, Office 601, 1053 Buenos Aires (✆ **11/5199-2517;** www.sayhueque.com), is a highly recommended small company with knowledgeable, friendly service and attention to personalized client care. The company began by catering to the young and adventurous on a budget, but has begun to deal with a more upscale yet independent-thinking clientele. Various tour themes include Literary Buenos Aires, Biking Buenos Aires, and Tango Buenos Aires, among many others. They also offer adventure tours within the vicinity of Buenos Aires such as to the Tigre Delta. Outside of Buenos Aires, they specialize in Patagonia and Iguazú, finding special out-of-the-way places for their clients. Based on their very personal service, this is among my favorite of the operators within Buenos Aires.
- **Euro Tur,** Viamonte 486, 1053 Buenos Aires (✆ **11/4312-6077;** www.eurotur.com), is one of the largest and oldest travel companies in Argentina, specializing in inbound travel, but they can also help walk-ins to accommodate travelers' needs directly while in Buenos Aires. They can arrange basic city tours to trips of all kinds throughout Argentina and South America.
- **Les Amis,** Maipú 1270, 1005 Buenos Aires (✆ **11/4314-0500;** www.lesamis.com.ar), is another large Argentine tour company, with offices throughout Buenos Aires and Argentina. They can arrange trips for Buenos Aires, Argentina, and many other parts of South America. Within the U.S., they are represented by Gina Heilpern, who maintains an office in New York. She can be reached at ✆ **718/857-5567.**

ORGANIZED ADVENTURE TRIPS The advantages of traveling with an organized group are plentiful, especially for travelers who have limited time and resources. Tour operators take the headache out of planning a trip, and they iron out the wrinkles that invariably pop up along the way. Many tours are organized to include guides, transportation, accommodations, meals, and gear (some outfits will even carry gear for you, for example, on trekking adventures).

- **Abercrombie & Kent,** 1520 Kensington Rd., Oak Brook, IL 60521 (✆ **800/323-7308;** www.abercrombiekent.com), is a luxury tour operator that offers "Patagonia: A Luxury Adventure," a 16-day trip that heads from Buenos Aires to Ushuaia for a 3-day cruise around Tierra del Fuego, followed by visits to Torres del Paine park, Puerto Varas, and Bariloche. Cost is $12,695 per person, double occupancy.
- **Mountain-Travel Sobek,** 6420 Fairmount Ave., El Cerrito, CA 94530 (✆ **888/MTSOBEK** [6876235] or 510/527-8100; fax 510/525-7718; www.mtsobek.com), are the pioneers of organized adventure travel, and they offer trips that involve a lot of physical activity. One of their more gung-ho journeys traverses part of the Patagonian Ice Cap in Fitzroy National Park for 21 days; a more moderate "Patagonia Explorer" mixes hiking with cruising. Prices start at $6,495 per person. Sobek always comes recommended for their excellent guides.
- **Backroads Active Vacations,** 801 Cedar St., Berkeley, CA 94710-1800 (✆ **800/GO-ACTIVE** [462-2848] or 510/527-1555; www.backroads.com),

offers a 8-day biking tour thr ough Northwest Argentina, with stops in Cachi and Cafayate, staying in luxur y accommodations such as Estancia Colomé. Costs run from $4,498.

- **Wilderness T ravel,** 1102 N inth S t., Berkeley, CA 94710 (✆ **800/368-2794** or 510/558-2488; www.wildernesstravel.com), offers a mor e mellow sightseeing/day-hiking tour ar ound P atagonia, including Los G laciares, U shuaia, E l Calafate, and P erito M oreno G lacier. Prices start at $4,295, depending on the number of guests (maximum 15).
- **Wildland Adventures,** 3516 NE 155th St., S eattle, WA 98155 (✆ **800/345-4453** or 206/365-0686; www.wildland.com), offers a fe w adv enture tours of Argentina. The "Salta T rek Thr ough Silent Valleys" tour takes in Salta, Jujuy, and the Andean plain. Two P atagonia tours ar e offer ed: "B est of P atagonia," which concentrates on Argentine Patagonia (including P enínsula Valdés, Río Gallegos, Perito Moreno, and Ushuaia), and "Los G laciares A dventure," which visits E l Calafate, F itzroy National Park, and Perito Moreno Glacier, among others. A ccommodations range from hotels to camping to r ustic park lodges. E co-tourism is an integral part of Wildland tours. P rices star t at $2,500 for the 8-day S alta tour and continue up wards of $4,125 for the 10-day Patagonia trip.

PRIVATE TOUR GUIDES It's easy to hir e guides thr ough y our hotel or any trav el agency in Buenos Aires. You may also want to contact **AGUITBA** (Asociación de Guías de Turismo de B uenos Air es), Carlos P ellegrini 833, S ixth F loor C, B uenos Air es (✆ **11/4322-2557;** www.aguitba.org.ar), a professional society of tour guides that has tried to pr omote licensing and other cr edentials legislation to ensur e the quality of guides. Its offices ar e open M onday to F riday from 1 to 6pm.

Private guides I r ecommend include Buenos Aires–based Marta Pasquali (✆ **11/15-4421-2486** [cell]; marpas@uolsinectis.com.ar) and M onica Varela (✆ **11/15-4407-0268** [cell]; monyliv@hotmail.com). Both have conducted tours for several years in B uenos Air es. They offer high-quality specialized tours on v arious themes, and often work with corporations. I highly r ecommend them for their specializ ed knowledge of the city , which goes far bey ond what many other tour guides kno w.

10 STAYING CONNECTED

CALLING HOME

Every street corner in Argentina has a *locutorio,* a small stor e with phone booths and often Internet desks. As you enter, say *"Una cabina, por fav or,"* and the cler k will dir ect you to a booth. There, a small monitor will display how much y our call costs, and y ou pay the cler k as y ou leav e. I nternational calls can be pricey , so it is best to use a telephone card such as *Teletele* or *Hablemas.* These ar e av ailable in most corner stor es and come in denominations of 5 pesos and 10 pesos. I ncreasingly popular and much cheaper are computer-based calling systems such as Skype. Most Internet cafes are now fitted with headphones and w ebcams, and you just need to open a S kype account to call anywhere in the world. When entering an I nternet cafe, say *"Una maquina, por favor,"* and the cler k will dir ect y ou to a computer. S ome I nternet cafes use pr e-charged car ds that y ou pur chase at the counter before logging on.

INTERNET ACCESS ABROAD

Travelers hav e any number of ways to check their e-mail and access the I nternet

on the road. Of course, using your own laptop—or even a PDA (personal digital assistant) or electronic organizer with a modem—gives you the most flexibility, and Wi-Fi is getting more ubiquitous. But even if you don't have a computer, you can still access your e-mail and even your office computer from cybercafes.

Without Your Own Computer

It's hard nowadays to find a city that *doesn't* have a few cyber cafes. Although there's no definitive directory for cybercafes—these are independent businesses, after all—two places to start looking are at **www.cybercaptive.com** and **www.cybercafe.com**.

Aside from formal cyber cafes, most **youth hostels** and hotels nowadays have at least one computer you can get to the Internet on. And most **public libraries** across the world offer Internet access free or for a small charge. Avoid **hotel business centers** unless you're willing to pay exorbitant rates.

Most major airports now have **Internet kiosks** scattered throughout their gates. These kiosks, which you'll also see in shopping malls, hotel lobbies, and tourist information offices around the world, give you basic Web access for a per-minute fee that's usually higher than cybercafe prices. The kiosks' clunkiness and high prices mean they should be avoided whenever possible.

To retrieve your e-mail, ask your **Internet Service Provider (ISP)** if it has a Web-based interface tied to your existing e-mail account. If your ISP doesn't have such an interface, you can use the free **mail2web** service (www.mail2web.com) to view and reply to your home e-mail. For more flexibility, you may want to open a free Web-based e-mail account with **Yahoo! Mail** (http://mail.yahoo.com). (Microsoft's Hotmail is another popular option, but Hotmail has severe spam problems.) Your home ISP may be able to forward your e-mail to the Web-based account automatically.

If you need to access files on your office computer, look into a service called **GoToMyPC** (www.gotomypc.com). The service provides a Web-based interface for you to access and manipulate a distant PC from anywhere—even a cybercafe—provided your "target" PC is on and has an always-on connection to the Internet (such as with Road Runner cable). The service offers top-quality security, but if you're worried about hackers, use your own laptop rather than a cybercafe computer to access the GoToMyPC system.

With Your Own Computer

Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity) is the buzzword in computer access, and more and more hotels, cafes, and retailers are signing on as wireless "hotspots" from where you can get high-speed connection without cable wires, networking hardware, or a phone line (see below). You can get Wi-Fi connection one of several ways. Most laptops sold nowadays have built-in Wi-Fi capability (an 802.11b wireless Ethernet connection). Mac owners have their own networking technology, Apple AirPort. Those with older computers can plug an 802.11b/**Wi-Fi card** (around $50) into their laptops. You sign up for wireless access service much as you do cellphone service, through a plan offered by one of several commercial companies that have made wireless service available in airports, hotel lobbies, and coffee shops, primarily in the U.S. (followed by the U.K. and Japan). **T-Mobile Hotspot** (www.t-mobile.com/hotspot) serves up wireless connections at more than 1,000 Starbucks coffee shops nationwide. **Boingo** (www.boingo.com) and **Wayport** (www.wayport.com) have set up networks in airports and high-class hotel lobbies. iPass providers (see below) also give you access to a few hundred wireless hotel-lobby setups. Best of all, you

don't need to be staying at the Four Seasons to use the hotel's network; just set yourself up on a nice couch in the lobby. The companies' pricing policies can be Byzantine, with a variety of monthly, per-connection, and per-minute plans, but in general you pay around $30 a month for limited access—and as more and more companies jump on the wireless bandwagon, prices are likely to get even more competitive.

There are also places that provide **free wireless networks** in cities around the world. To locate these free hotspots, go to **www.personaltelco.net/index.cgi/WirelessCommunities**.

If Wi-Fi is not available at your destination, most business-class hotels throughout the world offer dataports for laptop modems, and a few thousand hotels in the U.S. and Europe now offer free high-speed Internet access using an Ethernet network cable. You can bring your own cables, but most hotels rent them for around $10. **Call your hotel in advance** to see what your options are.

In addition, major ISPs have **local access numbers** around the world, allowing you to go online by simply placing a local call. Check your ISP's website or call its toll-free number and ask how you can use your current account away from home, and how much it will cost.

If you're traveling outside the reach of your ISP, the **iPass** network has dial-up numbers in most of the world's countries. You'll have to sign up with an iPass provider, who will then tell you how to set up your computer for your destination(s). For a list of iPass providers, go to www.ipass.com and click on "Individuals Buy Now." One solid provider is **i2roam** (✆ **866/811-6209** or 920/235-0475; www.i2roam.com).

Wherever you go, bring a **connection kit** of the right power and phone adapters, a spare phone cord, and a spare Ethernet network cable—or find out whether your hotel supplies them to guests.

USING A CELLPHONE ABROAD

The three letters that define much of the world's **wireless capabilities** are GSM (Global System for Mobiles)—a big, seamless network that makes for easy cross-border cellphone use throughout Europe and dozens of other countries worldwide. In the U.S., T-Mobile, AT&T Wireless, and Cingular use this quasi-universal system; in Canada, Microcell and some Rogers customers are GSM; and all Europeans and most Australians use GSM.

If your cellphone is on a GSM system and you have a world-capable multiband phone, such as many Sony Ericsson, Motorola, or Samsung models, you can make and receive calls across civilized areas on much of the globe, from Andorra to Uganda. Just call your wireless operator and ask for "international roaming" to be activated on your account. Unfortunately, per-minute charges can be high—usually $1 to $1.50 in western Europe, and up to $5 in places such as Russia and Indonesia.

That's why it's important to buy an "unlocked" world phone from the get-go. Many cellphone operators sell "locked" phones that restrict you from using any other removable computer memory phone chip (called a **SIM card**) other than the ones they supply. Having an unlocked phone allows you to install a cheap, prepaid SIM card (found at a local retailer) in your destination country. (Show your phone to the salesperson; not all phones work on all networks.) You'll get a local phone number—and much, much lower calling rates. Getting an already locked phone unlocked can be a complicated process, but it can be done; just call your cellular operator and say you'll be going abroad for several months and want to use the phone with a local provider.

For many, **renting** a phone is a good idea. (Even world-phone owners will have to rent new phones if they're traveling to

non-GSM regions, such as Japan or Korea.) While you can rent a phone from any number of overseas sites, including kiosks at airports and at car-rental agencies, I suggest renting the phone before you leave home. That way you can give loved ones and business associates your new number, make sure the phone works, and take the phone wherever you go—especially helpful for overseas trips through several countries, where local phone-rental agencies often bill in local currency and may not let you take the phone to another country.

Phone rental isn't cheap. You'll usually pay $40 to $50 per week, plus airtime fees of at least a dollar a minute. If you're traveling to Europe, though, local rental companies often offer free incoming calls within their home country, which can save you big bucks. The bottom line: Shop around.

Two good wireless rental companies are **InTouch USA** (✆ **800/872-7626;** www.intouchglobal.com) and **RoadPost** (✆ **888/290-1606** or 905/272-5665; www.roadpost.com). Give them your itinerary and they'll tell you what wireless products you need. InTouch will also, for free, advise you on whether your existing phone will work overseas; simply call ✆ **703/222-7161** between 9am and 4pm EST, or go to http://intouchglobal.com/travel.htm. For trips of more than a few weeks spent in one country, **buying a phone** becomes economically attractive, as many nations have cheap, no-questions-asked prepaid phone systems. Once you arrive at your destination, stop by a local cellphone shop and get the cheapest package; you'll probably pay less than $100 for a phone and a starter calling card. Local calls may be as low as 10¢ per minute, and in many countries incoming calls are free.

11 PLANNING YOUR TRIP ONLINE

SURFING FOR AIRFARES

The "big three" online travel agencies, **Expedia, Travelocity,** and **Orbitz,** sell most of the air tickets bought on the Internet. (Canadian travelers should try Expedia.ca and Travelocity.ca; U.K. residents can go to Expedia.co.uk and Opodo.co.uk.). Each has different business deals with the airlines and may offer different fares on the same flights, so it's wise to shop around. Expedia and Travelocity will also send you **e-mail notification** when a cheap fare becomes available to your favorite destination. Of the smaller travel agency websites, **SideStep** (www.sidestep.com) has gotten the best reviews from Frommer's authors. It's a browser add-on that purports to "search 140 sites at once," but in reality only beats competitors' fares as often as other sites do.

Also remember to check **airline websites.** Even with major airlines, you can often shave a few bucks from a fare by booking directly through the airline and avoiding a travel agency's transaction fee. But you'll get these discounts only by **booking online:** Most airlines now offer online-only fares that even their phone agents know nothing about. For the websites of airlines that fly to and from your destination, see "Getting There," earlier in this chapter.

Great **last-minute deals** are available through free weekly e-mail services provided directly by the airlines. Most of these are announced on Tuesday or Wednesday and must be purchased online. Most are only valid for travel that weekend, but some can be booked weeks or months in advance. Sign up for weekly e-mail alerts at airline websites or check metasearch sites that compile comprehensive lists of last-minute specials, such as **SmarterTravel.com.** For last-minute trips,

lastminutetravel.com in the U.S. and **lastminute.com** in Europe often have better air-and-hotel package deals than the major-label sites. A website listing numerous bargain sites and airlines around the world is **www.itravelnet.com**.

If you're willing to give up some control over your flight details, use what is called an **"opaque" fare service** such as **Priceline** (www.priceline.com; www.priceline.co.uk for Europeans) or its smaller competitor **Hotwire** (www.hotwire.com). Both offer rock-bottom prices in exchange for travel on a "mystery airline" at a mysterious time of day, often with a mysterious change of planes en route. The mystery airlines are all major, well-known carriers, and the possibility of being sent from Philadelphia to Chicago via Tampa is remote; airlines' routing computers have gotten a lot better than they used to be. But your chances of getting a 6am or 11pm flight are pretty high. Hotwire tells you flight prices before you buy; Priceline usually has better deals than Hotwire, but you have to play their "name our price" game. If you're new at this, the helpful folks at **BiddingForTravel** (www.biddingfortravel.com) do a good job of demystifying Priceline's prices and strategies. Priceline and Hotwire are great for flights within North America and between the U.S. and Europe. But for flights to other parts of the world, consolidators will almost always beat their fares. ***Note:*** Priceline now has a non-opaque service in addition to their opaque service. You now have the option to pick exact flights, times, and airlines from a list of offers.

For much more about airfares and savvy air-travel tips and advice, pick up a copy of ***Frommer's Fly Safe, Fly Smart*** (Wiley Publishing, Inc.).

SURFING FOR HOTELS

Shopping online for hotels is generally done one of two ways: by booking through the hotel's own website or through an independent booking agency (or a fare-service agency, such as Priceline; see below). These Internet hotel agencies have multiplied in mind-boggling numbers of late, competing for the business of millions of consumers surfing for accommodations around the world. This competitiveness can be a boon to consumers who have the patience and time to shop and compare the online sites for good deals—but shop they must, for prices can vary considerably from site to site. And keep in mind that hotels at the top of a site's listing may be there for no other reason than that they paid money to get the placement.

Of the "big three" sites, **Expedia** offers a long list of special deals and "virtual tours" or photos of available rooms so you can see what you're paying for (a feature that helps counter the claims that the best rooms are often held back from bargain-booking websites). **Travelocity** posts unvarnished customer reviews and ranks its properties according to the AAA rating system. Also reliable is **Hotels.com.** An excellent free program, **TravelAxe** (www.travelaxe.com), can help you search multiple hotel sites at once, even ones you may never have heard of—and conveniently lists the total price of the room, including the taxes and service charges. Another booking site, **Travelweb** (www.travelweb.com), is partly owned by the hotels it represents (including the Hilton, Hyatt, and Starwood chains) and is therefore plugged directly into the hotels' reservations systems—unlike independent online agencies, which have to fax or e-mail reservation requests to the hotel, a good portion of which get misplaced in the shuffle. More than once, travelers have arrived at the hotel only to be told that they have no reservation. To be fair, many of the major sites are undergoing improvements in service and ease of use. In the meantime, it's a good idea to **get a confirmation number** and **make a printout** of any online-booking transaction.

In the opaque-website category, **Priceline** and **Hotwire** are even better for hotels than for airfares; with both, you're allowed to pick the neighborhood and quality level of your hotel before offering up your money. Priceline's hotel product even covers Europe and Asia, though it's much better at getting five-star lodging for three-star prices than at finding anything at the bottom of the scale. On the downside, many hotels stick Priceline guests in their least desirable rooms. Be sure to go to the BiddingForTravel website (see above) before bidding on a hotel room on Priceline; it features a fairly up-to-date list of hotels that Priceline uses in major cities. For both Priceline and Hotwire, you pay upfront and the fee is nonrefundable.

Note: Some hotels do not provide loyalty program credits or points or other frequent-stay amenities when you book a room through opaque online services.

SURFING FOR RENTAL CARS

For booking rental cars online, the best deals are usually found at rental-car company websites, although all the major online travel agencies also offer rental-car reservations services. Priceline and Hotwire work well for rental cars too; the only "mystery" is which major rental company you get, and for most travelers the difference between Hertz, Avis, and Budget is negligible.

12 ACTIVE VACATION PLANNER

With so many climate zones and such a wide variety of terrain, Argentina is a haven for outdoor activities of all kinds. Locals have a healthy sense of adventure, and recreational outdoor sports are an important part of life here. Activities around Iguazú Falls range from easy hiking along the waterfall circuits and on San Martín Island to speed-rafting along the river and trekking into the jungle. The high plains of the Northwest draw adventurers seeking a little-traveled wilderness that can be explored by bike, on horseback, or in a 4WD vehicle. Near Mendoza are the tallest mountains in the Western Hemisphere, with spectacular rivers and high plains. And of course, Argentine Patagonia has more kayaking, climbing, and trekking opportunities than you could possibly fit in one lifetime.

Here is a brief introduction to the main outdoor activities in Argentina. Many will require you to hire a local guide to help you navigate the local terrain—and the sometimes-confusing local permit process. For more information, visit the website of the Argentine National Parks Service at **www.parquesnacionales.gov.ar**.

BACKPACKING

Overnight hiking trips will take you even deeper into the mountains and farther away from the hustle and bustle of life. Organized campsites dot most national parks and have rustic facilities. Camping is a popular activity for young Argentines, who flock to the peaks for their summer holidays in droves. There are excellent backpacking trips in the Lake District, where you can connect rustic and friendly mountain huts in Nahuel Huapi National Park. In the El Chaltén area, overnight trekking can take you beneath the granite spires of Mt. FitzRoy and Cerro Torre. Be sure to head out well prepared, with appropriate clothing and safety gear, a good map, and a reliable weather report. Always tell someone where you are going.

BIKING

The wide-open spaces and notoriously long distances can make for some adventurous two-wheel trips. With so many

seldom-traveled dirt roads, a good suspension bike will certainly come in handy here. The most popular area for recreational mountain biking is the Lake District, where you can cross the Andes to Chile and back, or pedal the stunning (albeit dusty) Seven Lakes Route, camping lakeside each night. Mountain biking is also popular in the Nahuel Huapi National Park area near Bariloche, as well as in the northern province of Salta, where tours take you from the clouds to the jungle. Biking in the wine country near Mendoza is also fun. And such cities as Córdoba have established bike routes. Virtually every town has a local bike shop, where you can rent a bike and ask locals for trail ideas.

FISHING

Argentine Patagonia is one of the world's premier destinations for fishing, particularly for fly-fishing. Trout and salmon populate the picturesque and isolated rivers and lakes from Junín de los Andes south to Esquel. Tierra del Fuego also draws fly-fishing fanatics. The fishing season runs from November through April, generally, and strict catch-and-release policies are in place in certain locales. Fishing on the Atlantic Coast is popular anywhere there is a dock, and the giant dorado fish in Entre Rios province is legendary.

HORSEBACK RIDING

Argentina has one of the world's great horse cultures, from the polo fields of Buenos Aires to the gauchos roaming the Pampas and Patagonia, and the terrain is ideal for horseback riding. Horses are well cared for and very common. Hour-long trail rides are offered at *estancias* throughout the country. In the wilder areas of the Northwest, the Mendozan Andes, and Patagonia, visitors can sign up for multiday pack trips.

KAYAKING

Thanks to the steep eastern slopes of the Andes, there are many fun rivers with bubbling rapids to entertain enthusiasts here. The Mendoza and Atuel rivers, in Mendoza Province, and the Juramento River, in Salta, are important spots. In the Lake District, the main river for rafting and kayaking is the Manso, south of Bariloche, although there are dozens of nearby rivers to keep a river rat happy.

MOUNTAINEERING & ROCK CLIMBING

Alpine climbers are drawn to a few hot spots in Argentina: to the mighty summit of Mt. Aconcagua in Mendoza, the tallest mountain in the world outside the Himalaya; to glaciated volcanoes, such as Mt. Tronador or Volcán Lanín, in the Lake District; and to the famous granite spires near El Chaltén.

SCUBA DIVING

The Atlantic Coast of Argentina offers some good scuba diving at Puerto Madryn, where experienced divers can get close up with marine wildlife. There are also a number of places in the Lake District for freshwater diving.

SKIING/SNOWBOARDING

Alpine skiing and snowboarding in Argentina offer plenty of choices for foreigners. The biggest resort, Las Leñas, is nestled in a high altitude valley 5 hours south of Mendoza city. Farther south, the biggest ski resort is at Bariloche's Catedral; and such gems as Chapelco in San Martín or Cerro Bayo in Villa La Angostura are nearby, allowing travelers to visit a few different resorts over the period of one visit. Finally, Cerro Castor in Ushuaia is the southernmost ski resort in the world. The Austral ski season runs from late June to September. Nordic or cross-country skiing

is not as popular , as it r equires a deeper snow base. B ackcountry skiing, or ski-touring, is also on the rise.

SURFING

Riding the breaks off the Atlantic Ocean is a gr owing spor t, and ther e is a healthy beach culture to accompany the local surfing scene. The most popular ar ea is near Mar del Plata, but there are a dozen interesting sur fing spots in the B uenos Air es province as well.

TREKKING/HIKING

With the spine of the Andes as a w estern backdrop, Argentina offers many options for hikers. The north of the country offers good trails heading out of vir tually ev ery town—from the high *altiplano* of the Northwest, and the tallest mountains in the Western H emisphere near M endoza, to the r olling hills of Cór doba. F arther south, the Lake D istrict has doz ens of good day hikes that wind thr ough lush valleys and along high ridges. The El Chaltén area of Los G laciares National Park is one of the world 's top tr ekking destinations. Don't forget Tierra del Fuego, where the national par k blends coastal marine life with high mountains.

WINDSURFING/KITE-SURFING

Another gr owing spor t, the wind- and kite-surfing scene just outside B uenos Aires at P eru B each is popular . I n the notoriously windy expanses of P atagonia, these spor ts ar e some what challenged b y daunting gusts and cold water , although Bariloche hosts an annual Wind Riders Festival each January.

Suggested Itineraries in Argentina

1 BUENOS AIRES IN 5 DAYS

by Michael Luongo

No length of time ever seems like enough in a city as wonderful as Buenos Aires. This itinerary takes you through 5 days in the capital—ideally a Wednesday to a Sunday. The route guides you through the best features of various neighborhoods—from the MicroCentro and Palermo Viejo to Recoleta and San Telmo. You'll eat several great meals, go shopping, and take in some breathtakingly beautiful sites. I've scheduled in plenty of downtime, too, in case you want to tango all night long and take it easy the following day (Buenos Aires, like New York, is a city that doesn't sleep).

Day ❶: Relaxing & Settling In

More than likely, you've arrived early in the morning after an all-night flight. Before you head out for the day, make reservations at **Cabaña las Lilas** ★★★ (p. 103) for dinner tonight. Afterward, head to Calle Florida, checking out the shops at **Galerías Pacífico** (p. 133), and have a snack at **Il Gran Caffe** ★ (p. 101). Wander down to **Plaza de Mayo** (p. 125) and take a look at historic sites such as the **Cabildo** ★ (p. 126), Buenos Aires's original city hall, the **Metropolitan Cathedral** ★★ (p. 126), and the **Casa Rosada** ★★★ (p. 126), with Evita's famous balcony. Head back to the hotel for a much-needed nap before heading out to Cabaña las Lilas for dinner. Certainly you've admired the view of **Puerto Madero** (p. 127) from your table, so have a wander dockside.

Day ❷: Historical Buenos Aires

I highly recommend exploring the historic center of Buenos Aires with a professional guide, such as **Borello Travel & Tours** (✆ **800/405-3072** or 212/686-4911; p. 41), **Say Hueque Tours** (✆ **11/5199-2517;** p. 42), or private tour guides **Marta Pasquali** (✆ **11-15/4421-2486**) or **Monica Varela** (✆ **11-15/4407-0268**). As they lead you through the historic center of Buenos Aires, passing the **Plaza de Mayo** (p. 125) and the turn-of-the-20th-century marvel **Avenida de Mayo** to **Congreso,** they'll explain how architecture, history, and the lost glory of a powerful Argentina is reflected in the streets of Buenos Aires. Ride the **A line subway**'s (p. 68) wooden trains down to station Avenida de Mayo. Have a coffee and *medialunas* at **Café Tortoni** ★★★ (p. 100), one of the city's most historic and scenic cafes, and try to catch the conversation of Buenos Aires locals discussing the latest issues. At 3:30pm, head back to Plaza de Mayo for the **Madres of Plaza de Mayo,** a weekly protest held by the mothers of the 30,000 young people who disappeared during the military regime between 1976 and 1982. Head back and take a nap at the hotel. In the evening, have dinner in the glorious gilded dining hall of **Club Español** ★★ (p. 102).

Buenos Aires in 5 Days

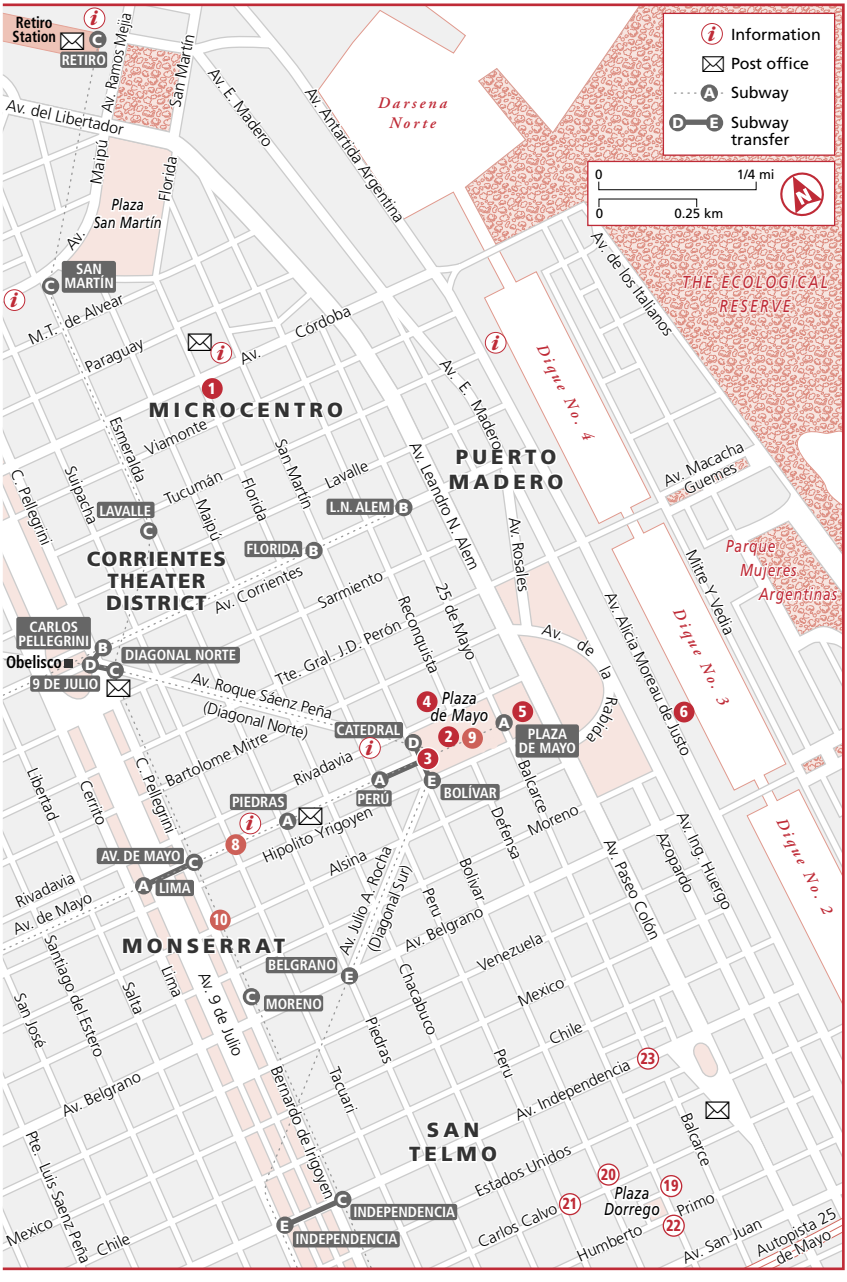
Day 1
1. Galerías Pacífico
2. Plaza de Mayo
3. Cabildo
4. Metropolitan Catedral
5. Casa Rosada
6. Cabaña Las Lilas

Day 2
7. Congreso
8. Café Tortoni
9. Plaza de Mayo
10. Club Español

Day 3
11. Recoleta Cemetery
12. La Biela
13. Avenida Alvear
14. La Bourgogne

Day 4
15. Plaza Italia
16. Zoological Gardens
17. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes
18. Casa Cruz

Day 5
19. Plaza Dorrego
20. San Telmo Antiques Market
21. Bar El Federal
22. Galería El Solar de French
23. El Viejo Almacén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RETIRO
Av. Ramos Mejía
San Martín
Av. del Libertador
Av. E. Madero
Av. Antártida Argentina
Darsena Norte
Maipú
Florida
Plaza San Martín
Av.
SAN MARTÍN
M.T. de Alvear
Paraguay
Córdoba
Av.
MICROCENTRO
Viamonte
Esmeralda
Suipacha
Tucumán
Florida
San Martín
Lavalle
Av. E. Madero
Av. Leandro N. Alem
PUERTO MADERO
Dique No. 4
Av. de los Italianos
THE ECOLOGICAL RESERVE
Av. Macacha Guemes
C. Pellegrini
LAVALLE
Maipú
L.N. ALEM
FLORIDA
CORRIENTES THEATER DISTRICT
Av. Corrientes
Sarmiento
Av. Rosales
Parque Mujeres Argentinas
Mitre
Y Vedia
Dique No. 3
Av. Alicia Moreau de Justo
CARLOS PELLEGRINI
Obelisco
DIAGONAL NORTE
9 DE JULIO
Av. Roque Sáenz Peña
(Diagonal Norte)
Tte. Gral. J.D. Perón
Reconquista
25 de Mayo
Av. de la Rabida
4 Plaza de Mayo
5
6
CATEDRAL
2
9
PLAZA DE MAYO
C. Bartolome Mitre
Rivadavia
3
Libertad
Cerrito
C. Pellegrini
PIEDRAS
PERÚ
BOLÍVAR
Hipolito Yrigoyen
Balcarce
Defensa
Moreno
Av. Paseo Colón
Av. Ing. Huergo
Azopardo
Dique No. 2
8
AV. DE MAYO
LIMA
Alsina
Rivadavia
Av. de Mayo
Julio A. Roca
(Diagonal Sur)
Perú
Bolívar
Av. Belgrano
10
MONSERRAT
Santiago del Estero
Salta
Lima
Av. 9 de Julio
BELGRANO
MORENO
Chacabuco
Venezuela
Mexico
Chile
Piedras
Tacuarí
Bernardo de Irigoyen
Perú
Av. Independencia
23
Balcarce
San José
Av. Belgrano
Pte. Luis Saenz Peña
Mexico
Chile
SAN TELMO
Estados Unidos
20
Plaza Dorrego
19
Carlos Calvo
21
Primo
Humberto
22
Av. San Juan
Autopista 25 de Mayo
INDEPENDENCIA
INDEPENDENCIA

Day ❸: A Day in Recoleta

Sleep in and have a late breakfast at your hotel. Have your hotel make dinner reservations at **La Bourgogne** ★★★ (p. 104), a fine French restaurant in the **Alvear Palace Hotel** ★★★ (p. 83). Then head to **Recoleta Cemetery** ★★★ (p. 124), in the Recoleta neighborhood. Pay homage to the most famous tomb of all, Evita's. Make sure to wander around and see many of the other tombs, all glorious works of art. Around the corner from the cemetery, head to the **Centro Cultural Recoleta** ★ (p. 125) and check out the newest art exhibit. If you've brought the kids along or you're feeling young at heart, don't forget to visit the children's section inside, with its interactive science exhibits. Afterward, head across **Plaza Francia** and take a coffee at **La Biela** ★★★ (p. 106), one of the most famous cafes in the city. After this much-needed break, it's time to do some shopping along **Avenida Alvear,** stopping in such stores as **Polo Ralph Lauren** (p. 141), built into a grand mansion. If you've been shopping for hours, you're just in time for your reservation at La Bourgogne.

Day ❹: Palermo

After breakfast, head to **Plaza Italia** and take a brief walk around, enjoying the contrast of the green trees against the white-marble buildings lining this part of Avenida Santa Fe. Head to the **Zoological Gardens** ★ (p. 123) and check out all the animals, after buying special food for them at the entrance. After ward, stroll down Avenida Libertador and wander among the parks, heading to **Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes** ★★ (p. 130). It's a long walk, but beautiful all along the way. Head back to the hotel, freshen up, and head for dinner at **Casa Cruz** ★★ (p. 110), in Palermo Viejo, one of the city's best places to be seen on a night out.

Day ❺: San Telmo & Tango

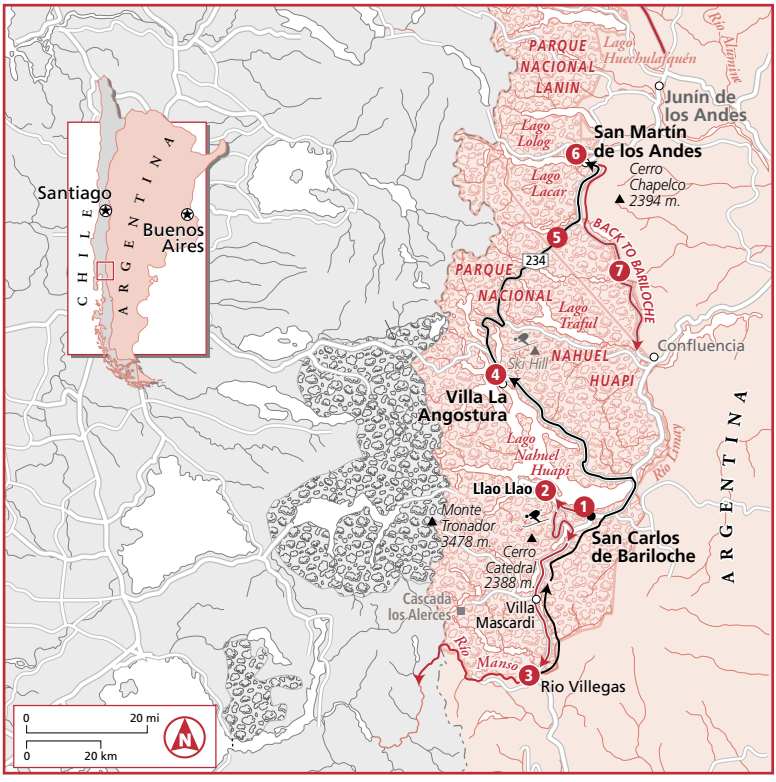
Head to **Plaza Dorrego** (p. 122) for the Sunday **San Telmo antiques fair** ★★★ (p. 122), one of the most enjoyable highlights of Buenos Aires. In this open-air bazaar, you can buy small antiques and souvenirs to bring home, and watch live tango performances. (Keep an eye on your pockets while you watch.) Then, grab a late lunch at the atmospheric **Bar El Federal** ★★ (p. 107). Head up **Calle Defensa** to take a look at more antiques in the numerous shops lining the street, such as **Galería El Solar de French** (p. 137). Head back to the hotel and freshen up. You're having dinner tonight at **El Viejo Almacén** (p. 147). Watching their show is a great way to end your 5-day stay in Buenos Aires.

2 NORTHERN PATAGONIA: LAKES & VILLAGES

by Christie Pashby

One of the world's great alpine playgrounds, the Argentina Lake District has plenty to discover. Visitors can combine adventure activities with scenic drives and other more chilled-out explorations. In the evenings, enjoy great food and wine, and stay in lovely local inns. You'll need a rental car to get from San Carlos de Bariloche to San Martín de los Andes and back. Pick one up at the Bariloche airport, but be ready for dirt roads and some of the most aggressive drivers in Bariloche.

The trip starts with some orientation in Bariloche, the area's main city. After exploring there for a few days, you'll continue on to two nearby towns: Villa la Angostura and San Martín de los Andes. The entire driving route is spectacular, with tall forests, expansive mountain lakes, and photo opportunities at every turn.



Day 1: Bariloche

Fly into San Carlos de Bariloche from Buenos Aires. Pick up a rental car at the airport and drive into town along the shores of the spectacular Lago Nahuel Huapi. Check into an inn with a lake view such as **Villa Huinid** ★★ or **Hotel Sol del Nahuel** ★ (p. 319). If you can afford it, head along Avenida Bustillo for 25km (16 miles) to the incredible **Llao Llao Hotel & Resort** ★★ (p. 318). After relaxing by the pool, make reservations for dinner at **Yuco** ★★ (p. 324), near the Llao Llao, or at the hidden **Naan** ★★ (p. 320) in town.

Day 2: Bariloche

After a lovely breakfast at your hotel, make a reservation for your next day's activities (see below). Then hop into your car and explore the **Circuito Chico** ★★ (p. 311), a leisurely loop that takes you past the many bays of Nahuel Huapi Lake. Take the beautiful sightseeing chairlift to the top of **Cerro Campanario** ★, to get a stunning view of the area before heading west past the Llao Llao Resort. Stop in **Colonia Suiza** for lunch—a traditional *curanto* if it's a Wednesday or Sunday. After a siesta at your hotel room, head out for dinner, Argentine-style, sometime after

9pm. Tonight, choose a traditional Argentine *asado* at either **Tarquino** (p. 322) or **Rincon Patagonico** (p. 324).

Day 3: Bariloche Rafting

There are many active adventures to choose from in Bariloche: sea kayaking, hiking, or fishing, to name a few. My absolute favorite is white-water rafting on the emerald **Manso River,** south of Bariloche, with **Huala Adventure Tourism** (p. 313). They'll pick you up at your hotel at 9am and drive south through the lush valleys past lakes Gutiérrez, Mascardi, and Guillelmo, before turning westward to the height of the Andes. The rafting is intense and adrenaline-packed, for good swimmers only! After lunch, a big barbecue will recharge you before you head back to town. You may be up for a lighter dinner tonight after that big lunch. Try **Kandahar** ★ or **Vegetariano** ★ (p. 320 and 323).

Day 4: Villa La Angostura

Eat breakfast, check out, and give yourself some time to explore the shops and markets of Bariloche. The drive continues along RN 231 along the north shore of Nahuel Huapi Lake to the swish town of Villa la Angostura, which is definitely an upscale joint. Check into **Las Balsas** ★★ (p. 329) or into the more economical **Hostería Puerto Sur** ★ (p. 331), in the lakeside suburb of Bahia Manzano. Lunch on the water at the **Correntoso Hotel's Puerto restaurant** (p. 330), then hike out the Arrayan peninsula, taking a boat back to the port. Enjoy an afternoon of fishing or hiking, then head to the excellent **Tinto Bistro** ★★ (p. 332) for dinner or **La Delfina** ★ (p. 332).

Day 5: Ruta de los Siete Lagos

Eat breakfast, check out, and stop at a supermarket for picnic supplies. Then head north on RN 234, the spectacular Ruta de los Siete Lagos. It's 110km (68 miles) to San Martín de los Andes, but give yourself most of the day to get there. Plan to stop frequently to explore the lakeshores at Lago Correntoso and Lago Falkner. The Vuliñaco waterfall is a great picnic spot. You'll arrive in San Martín de los Andes, Bariloche's tidier and smaller sister, in time for an afternoon tea at the historic **Arrayán Tea House** ★ (p. 337). Make your plans for the following day's activities. Check into your inn at **La Casa de Eugenia** ★ or the cozy **La Raclette** ★ (p. 341). San Martín has many good restaurants; try **La Tasca** ★ (p. 342) or **La Reserva** ★ (p. 343).

Day 6: San Martín de los Andes

Eat breakfast and leave the car behind. Your hiking guide is here to drive you to the lovely trails of Lanín National Park. In the evening, head to **La Fondue de Betty** ★ (p. 343) for the San Martín classic—a bubbling and scrumptious fondue dinner, with *vino tinto* of course!

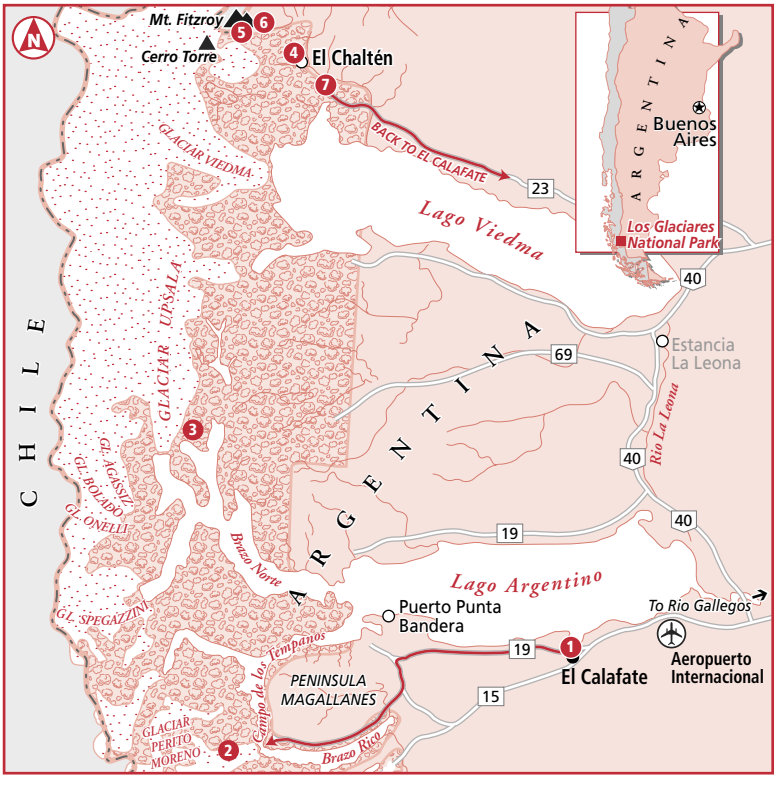
Day 7: Bariloche & Home

Check out, fill up the tank, and take the "other" way back to Bariloche. You can either go via the lovely mountain village of **Villa Traful,** or via the marvelous raw canyons of the **Paso Córdoba.** You'll be back in Bariloche in time to catch a midafternoon flight to Buenos Aires.

3 HIKING SOUTHERN ARGENTINE PATAGONIA IN 1 WEEK

by Christie Pashby

Hikers from all over the world make the long journey to Patagonia for some of the best trekking on the planet. The terrain is simply world-class: stunning granite spires, expansive



glaciers, thick forests, and wide-open plains. There is much to see here, enough to keep hard-core hikers and backpackers busy for a month.

This itinerary starts with a day spent visiting the stunning Perito Moreno Glacier and hiking on the ice itself. Then head north to El Chaltén, the "National Capital of Trekking." The hikes are demanding, but easily manageable for fit people with some trekking experience. Each day ends back in town for a good meal and a hot shower.

The best time of year for this trip is either November or March, when the winds are relatively calm, and the trails are less busy than in high season (Jan–Feb).

Day 1: El Calafate

After your trip from Buenos Aires, settle into a nice local inn; try **Kau Yatún** ★ (p. 374) or the economical **Kau Kaleshen** (p. 374). Head out for a stroll around town and sign yourself up for the "Big Ice" experience the following day, and also book your trip to Estancia Cristina for the next day. It's also a good idea to book your bus ticket to El Chaltén. Pop in for dinner at the excellent **Casimiro Biguá** ★★ (p. 375), where you can enjoy king crab from Tierra del Fuego or the local specialty, Patagonian lamb. Get a good night's sleep; tomorrow is a big day.

Day ❷: Perito Moreno Glacier ★★★

You'll be picked up right after br eakfast and driven out to Lago Argentino for the **"Big I ce"** ★★ adv enture outfitter with **Hielo y Aventura** (p. 381). Once you spot your first jaw-dr opping vie ws of P erito Moreno G lacier, ther e's no turning back. After traveling by boat across the lake, hike up the southern side of the glacier . Your guides will set y ou up with crampons and lead you deep onto the seemingly endless mass of ice. You'll skir t cr evasses and explore its fr ozen horizons. Book tomorrow's trip to Estancia Cristina upon return. After a good siesta back in town, head out for a w ell-deserved dinner of Argentine classics, such as choriz o and blood sausages, and a big piece of tenderloin with red wine at **La Tablita** ★★ (p. 377).

Day ❸: Estancia Cristina

Another early morning! After boar ding the catamaran and heading out on the shores of Lago Argentino, y ou'll enjo y br eakfast overlooking icebergs and glaciers. B ack on ground at the aw esome **Estancia Cristina** ★★★ (p . 372), hop into a 4WD truck and drive to a lookout o ver the massive **Upsala Glacier.** The hiking star ts here and heads along the ancient ridges befor e dropping into a spectacular glacier-car ved canyon. Keep your eye out for condors and fossils. Guides provide your lunch en r oute. The trek ends with enough time left for y ou to visit the *estancia* museum, before boarding the boat and heading back to E l Calafate. For dinner tonight? H ow about spaghetti and a fe w *cervezas* at **La Cocina** ★ (p. 376)?

Day ❹: El Chaltén & Hiking

The first bus of the day heads to E l Chaltén at 7:30am, deliv ering you there early enough that y ou'll have time to dr op off your luggage at y our hotel— **Senderos Hostería** ★★ (p . 389) or **El P uma** (p. 388)—pick up picnic supplies and hit the trail. Today's trek will take y ou along the FitzRoy River up to the **Cerro Torre Lookout** (p. 386). It takes about 4 hours. Back in to wn, stop b y **Patagonicus** for a coffee and a sw eet treat. After y our now-regular siesta, head to the cozy and historic **Ruca Mahuida** ★★ (p. 390) for dinner.

Day ❺: Hiking

Up early again, y ou've got a spectacular day ahead of you on the trail. Your inn will give you a good br eakfast and pack y ou a picnic lunch if y ou ask the pr evious day. The trail today is **Laguna de los Tres** ★★ (p. 387), affording a close-up vie w of **Mt. FitzRoy.** You'll be on the trail for 10 hours, a good full day. But you'll be home in time for a hot sho wer, a r est, and then dinner at **Fuegia** ★ (p. 390), which serves abundant salads and creative curries.

Day ❻: Hiking

Your last day hiking in E l Chaltén will be unforgettable. After filling up on br eakfast and loading your pack with lunch and good rain gear (no matter what the morning weather is like, pack a good rain jacket), your transfer takes y ou 17km (11 miles) south of E l Chaltén to the **Río Eléctrico** and the Hostería El Pilar. From here, you'll hike up a gradual climb and o ver the pass, stopping at the lo vely **Laguna Capri** for rest. B ack at the lodge, head for pizza at **Estepa** (p. 390) for dinner.

Day ❼: El Calafate & Home

If y our flight leav es E l Calafate in the afternoon, y ou'll need to be on the first bus out of El Chaltén. Back in El Calafate, you may have time for lunch before transferring to the airport and flying to Buenos Aires, exhausted but invigorated fr om a week of tr ekking amid fine peaks and grand glaciers.

4 MENDOZA: MALBEC & MOUNTAINS

by Christie Pashby

You can practically do it all here in Mendoza—live large, indulge your palate, and experience thrilling adventures and marvelous scenery. This journey starts with a few nights based out of Mendoza, a marvelous city with excellent restaurants, charming cafes, and plenty of plazas and parks. Then head out of town to relax in the wine country and explore the three principal wine areas: Luján de Cuyo, Maipú, and the lovely Valle de Uco. You'll also want time to relax and get a good look at the spectacular Andes Mountains, which make a majestic backdrop for the rural countryside here. Good restaurants are another hallmark of the region. Tables are in high demand, so I recommend that you plan ahead by making dinner reservations each morning before you head out. Ask your hotel reception to do so for you, and plan to take a taxi to dinner so you can drink wine. Driving the high mountain roads requires some attention and care. Keep a good map on hand, and don't be afraid to ask for directions. Mendocinos are very friendly, proud, and happy to have you visiting them.

Day ❶: Mendoza

A midmorning flight will have you in Mendoza, from either Buenos Aires or Santiago, in time for a leisurely lunch in town. Check into a downtown hotel; the posh **Park Hyatt** ★★ (p. 267) and the midrange **Hotel Argentino** (p. 269) have the best locations, in front of the Plaza Independencia. Head to the outdoor tables in front of **Azafrán** ★ (p. 271) to acquaint yourself with the local specialties. After an afternoon exploring the parks and plazas of Mendoza, relax by the pool. Then stop by one of the local wine stores for some sampling. The Wines of Mendoza runs tastings and offers glasses by the flight. It's a good place to mingle and grab some light dinner. If you've still got room, indulge in some of the continent's best ice cream.

Day ❷: Wines of Luján

After a nice breakfast in your hotel, head out for a day exploring the wines of **Luján de Cuyo** (p. 283). This is the "Tierra del Malbec," where Argentina's signature varietal has found its most harmonic home. Because it's your first day in the area, it's worth signing up for an organized tour to help you get the lay of the land. Ask for a tour that includes three vineyard stops and lunch (I highly recommend **Lagarde** and **Ruca Malen**). In the afternoon, relax in a plaza or by the pool. Then hit the funky **Las Negras** ★ for dinner, and stroll the sidewalk cafes and bars of Calle Aristides before hitting the sack.

Day ❸: Wines of Maipú

Today is a good day to switch to a more rural inn. After breakfast, check out of your hotel and pick up a rental car. Then head south of town and drop your bags off at your inn in either Chacras de Coria, at **Finca Adalgisa** ★★ (p. 281), or farther out of town at the posh **Cavas Wine Lodge** ★ (p. 283). From either one, you can head out on bicycle or in your car to explore more vineyards. How about lunch at the new bistro **Divina Marga** ★ (p. 287)? Don't forget an afternoon by the

pool! If you are at Finca Adalgisa, stroll into the charming heart of the village of Chacras de Coria and follow your nose. At Cavas, just stay put. Either way, nighttime amid the vines is romantic and relaxing.

Day 4: Alta Montaña

Eat breakfast, pack a sweater, and pick up supplies for a picnic (local olives, local jam, local cheese, local bread—it's all right here!), and drive west into the Andes. The road first heads south out of town and then west on RN 7 to Potrerillos and on to the Chilean border. After Uspallata, it's a wild and winding mountain road that takes you to the base of the highest mountain in the world outside the Himalayas, the mighty **Mt. Aconcagua.** Don't miss the photo opportunity at the mystical **Puente de Inca.** If you're a confident driver, return via the winding spiral, cliff-hanging Ruta 52 past the thermal springs at Villavicencio. When you're back in the Mendoza area, it's worth the effort to dine at **La Bourgogne** ★★★ (p. 284). Take a taxi so you can enjoy the excellent wines at the Vistalba vineyard.

Day 5: Day Off

You'll be tired, perhaps, from driving and indulging. If you're still raring to go, head out for horseback riding or white-water rafting on the Mendoza River. Or rent a bike and explore the rural roads. Be sure to save room for a spectacular dinner at celebrity chef Francis Mallman's outstanding **1884** ★★★ (p. 271)—another excellent reason to call a taxi.

Day 6: Wines of the Valle de Uco

It may be the most scenic area of Mendoza, and well worth the 2-hour drive south of town. After breakfast at your inn, follow the Pan-American Highway RN 40 toward the town of Tunuyán. It's a land of rolling hills, poplar-lined country roads, and in-your-face close-ups of the high Andes. Your first stop should be the impressive **Bodegas Salentein** ★★ (p. 292), which includes an interesting art gallery and one of the spookiest and most fascinating cellars in the country. Either their vineyard cafe or the nearby Posada Salentein makes a good stop for lunch. Drop in at another "it" vineyard such as **Andeluna** or **O. Fournier** in the afternoon. A light dinner may be in order: How about a *tabla de picadas*—a sampling of local cheeses and meats, served with a glass of Malbec on a patio at your inn?

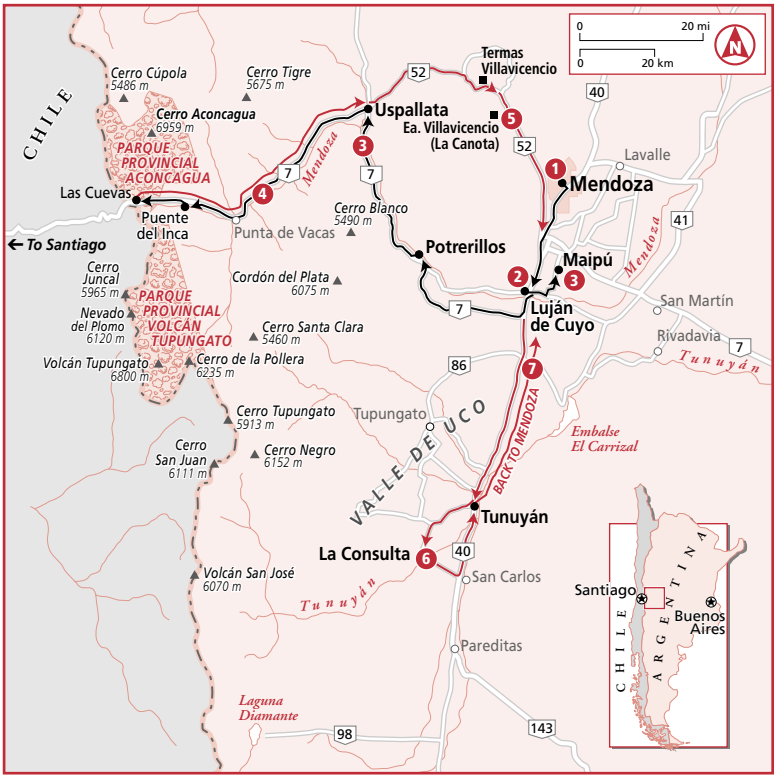
Day 7: Shopping & Home

If this is your only stop in Argentina, it's worth checking out the shops in town for leather goods and other souvenirs. After eating breakfast and checking out of your hotel, stop by the **Palmares Open Mall** (p. 275) and then park in downtown Mendoza for one more stroll down the shop-lined pedestrian mall. Then head to the airport to drop off your car and catch your flight home.

5 PATAGONIA WILDLIFE: PENINSULA VALDES & LOS GLACIARES NATIONAL PARK

by Christie Pashby

Patagonia is for nature lovers, particularly in November—the one month of the year when you can see whales and penguins on the Atlantic Coast and still see the peaks and glaciers of southern Patagonia without freezing. Start your trip on the coast at Puerto Madryn, and spend a full day exploring the Península Valdés. This time should include a whale-watching trip and a visit to sea lion colonies. You will need a second day to see the penguin colony at the northern tip of the peninsula, making it worthwhile to stay on



the Península Valdés itself. Then you'll need a full day to travel south to El Calafate. If you are a keen bird-watcher and can afford deluxe lodgings, stay at the spectacular new *estancia* Eolo. I saw eight condors at once there in November! From there, you can explore the remote areas of Los Glaciares National Park.

Day ❶: Puerto Madryn & Eco Centro

After flying in from Buenos Aires, you have no real choice but to spend the first night on the beachside town of Puerto Madryn. The nicest spot is the **Hotel Territorio** ★ (p. 354). A bit more economical, the **Hotel Bahía Nueva** ★★ (p. 354) is centrally located. After transferring from the airport at Trelew and checking in, you'll arrive with time to explore the coastal waters and make a visit to the outstanding **Ecocentro museum** ★★ (p. 357), which will orient you to the wonders of the local oceans. Be sure to book tomorrow's full-day tour of Península Valdés, asking the agency to drop you off at your inn the following night. For dinner, indulge in something from the sea at **Mar y Meseta** ★★ (p. 355), and stroll back along the beach.

Day ❷: Península Valdés

Tours always get an early start; most would have you leaving your hotel in Madryn at around 8am. Your first stop will likely be the easygoing beach town of **Puerto Pirámides,** from where all the whale-watching tours head out to catch the annual congregation of Southern Right Whales. These are remarkably social mammals, and they'll no doubt get incredibly close to your boat. Later, your guide will head on to the far eastern coast of the peninsula to visit the sea lion and elephant seal colonies. They usually stop at a cafeteria-style restaurant. Keep your eye out for other wildlife, such as ostrich-resembling *choiques* and the strange *mara,* which looks like a mix of a rabbit with a dog. Afterward, they'll drop you off at the outstanding **Faro Punta Delgada** ★★ (p. 361) lighthouse inn, where you can hike along the beach. After a nice dinner in the hotel, climb to the top of the lighthouse for a starry view.

Day ❸: Penguins & El Calafate

Eat breakfast at the inn, then ask to be taken to the remote **Estancia San Lorenzo** (p. 360) for a private viewing of their 200,000-strong Magellan penguin colony. From there, head all the way back to Trelew for your flight to El Calafate, and grab lunch en route. You'll arrive in El Calafate in time to be transferred to your *estancia* for dinner. The excellent new rural hotel, **Eolo Patagonia's Spirit** ★★ (p. 372), will take care of it all.

Day ❹: Condor-Viewing

Eat breakfast and then head out with your bird-watching guide in search of the majestic condor, with its 3m (10-ft.) wing span. You'll look for shorebirds on the coast of Lago Argentino and the mighty predators amid the high peaks of Cerro Frías. In the afternoon, enjoy a leisurely tea in the ranch's living room, with binoculars nearby. Dinner will also be served in the *estancia.*

Day ❺: Perito Moreno Glacier

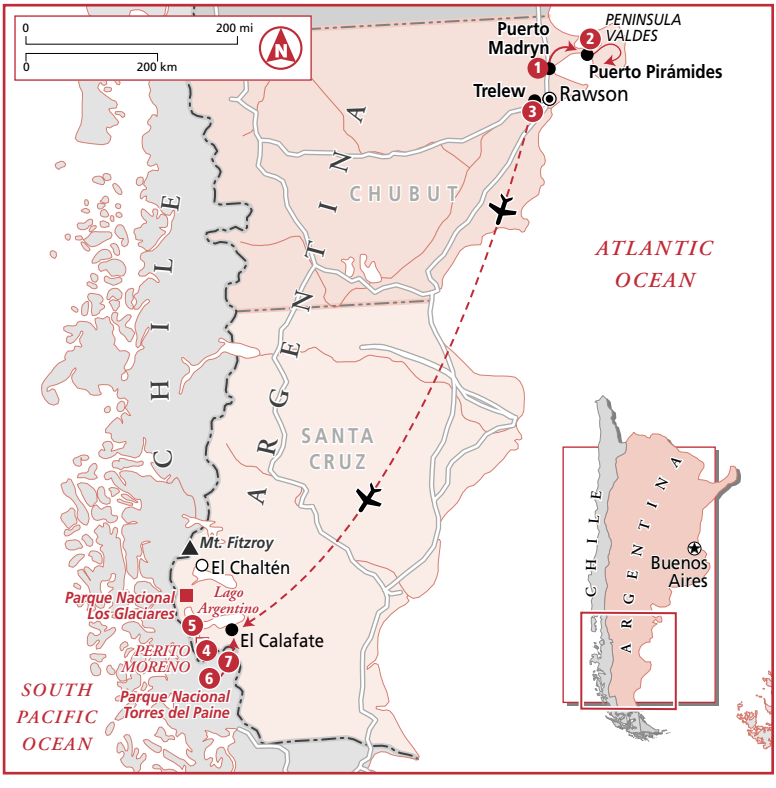
You can't come to El Calafate without seeing the world-famous Perito Moreno Glacier, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. After breakfast, you'll be driven west to the glacier's lookout point. Plan ahead and sign up for a **"Minitrekking"** (p. 381) tour, where you strap on crampons and go for a short hike on the glacier itself. It also includes a short boat trip beneath the southern wall of the glacier. Return to the *estancia* with time to relax, read, and get back to those binoculars. For dinner, don't miss the local specialty, barbecued Patagonian lamb.

Day ❻: Torres del Paine in 1 Day

It looks close, and as the crow flies, Chile's **Torres del Paine National Park** ★★ (p. 390) is right there on the horizon. Of course, this is Patagonia, and roads are long and dirty. It takes a few hours, in fact, to reach Torres del Paine, but it's well worth the drive, especially if you're looking to see guanacos, the Patagonian cousin of the llama. You'll also see the black rock peaks—known as *torres* and *cuernos* (towers and horns)—of this very popular park, and get to do some short hikes. Return for a late dinner at the *estancia.*

Day ❼: El Calafate & Home

After breakfast, pack your bags and snap a few more photographs of the incredible emptiness on every horizon. Then stop in the town of El Calafate to stroll the shops along the main tourist drag, Avenida Del Libertador, before heading to the airport for your flight to Buenos Aires.



6 NORTHWEST ARGENTINA: THE REAL SOUTH AMERICA

by Charlie O'Malley

Argentina is a cultural melting pot, with Buenos Aires having a distinctly European flavor and Patagonia a Scandinavian hue. That is why the Northwest can be so satisfying to visit as it is definitely 100% South American. The following is a 5-day itinerary that ensures that you truly experience the rich indigenous culture of this beautiful region with its strong strain of Spanish colonialism. Grandiose architecture sits well with excellent local food, washed down with delicious wines. The regional handicrafts are as colorful as the landscapes, and the people are Argentina's friendliest. To see the most in the shortest time possible, it is best to hire a car or go with a reliable tour company.

Day ❶: Arrival Salta City

Use this charming city as your base for the first few days. Fly in early morning from Buenos Aires and check into the down-to-earth but efficient Hotel del **Antiguo Convento** ★★ (p. 218). Stroll the lovely plaza and visit the gilded **Iglesia San Francisco** ★★ (p. 211) and the baroque **Salta Cathedral** (p. 212). Have lunch in the sunny courtyard of **Casa Moderna** ★, Vte. Lopez 423 (p. 219), before doing what the locals do and taking a well-deserved siesta. Early evening is spent in the fascinating **MAAM** ★★★ (p. 211), known locally as the *mummy museum.* Enjoy a Torrontes wine at **Café Van Gogh** (p. 219) on the plaza before wandering over to Salta's finest restaurant **José Balcarce** ★★★ (p. 220).

Day ❷: Shopping in Salta

This special city deserves more than 1 day. Take the **cable car to San Bernardo Hill** ★ (p. 212) and enjoy panoramic views of the city while sipping a coffee. Then take a taxi to the hilltop village of San Lorenzo, where you can enjoy a lunch at the Tuscan-style **El Castillo de San Lorenzo** ★ (p. 219) hotel. After the customary siesta, take a taxi ride to the **Mercado Artesanal** (p. 214), located in a handsome, renovated millhouse. Here you can enjoy afternoon tea amid genuine local products. Back in the city, freshen up before hitting Salta's nightlife street Calle Balcarce. Enjoy a foot-stomping music session at **Café de Tiempo** ★ (p. 221) and later join the dancing yourself at the numerous clubs and discos nearby.

Day ❸: Wine Tasting in Cafayate

Check out of your hotel and go south in a rented car as far as the wine town of Cafayate. The red rock scenery is gorgeous, and the 3-hour journey goes quickly. Enjoy a light lunch on the plaza of this sleepy village before visiting **El Porvenir** ★★ (p. 224) winery for excellent wines and **El Esteco** (p. 224) for palatial architecture. Both are within the town limits. Check into the atmospheric **Killa Cafayate** ★★ (p. 225) and dine on llama at **Machacha** ★★ (p. 228) restaurant.

Day ❹: Cachi

As its name implies, this hilltop village will take a hold of you. Its sparkling white adobe cottages and quaint church take you back in time. Visit the **archaeological museum** (p. 211) to see the area's rich Incan heritage. In the afternoon, check into the luxurious **La Merced del Alto** ★★ (p. 223), where you can enjoy a beautiful dinner beneath the stars.

Day ❺: Quebrada de Humahuaca

Jujuy province is the last stop before Bolivia, as seen in its landscape and architecture. Drive north from Salta along the multicolored mountain range **Quebrada de Humahuaca** ★ (p. 228), which will make even the most jaded traveler gasp. Turn off the main road to visit the quaint village of **Purmamarca** ★★ (p. 229) and its Technicolor backdrop. Continue north until you reach the town of **Tilcara** ★★ (p. 228), a cobblestoned gem with old-world charm. Dine at busy **Los Puestos** (p. 229) before visiting the indigenous ruins of **Pucará.** Continue north along the main road before you reach sleepy **Humahuaca** (p. 228) village, where you can browse through the plaza market before turning south toward Salta. Treat yourself to some pampering at the **House of Jasmines** ★★★ (p. 218) before flying out the next day.

5

Buenos Aires

by Michael Luongo

A country's tragedy became a traveler's opportunity, and in between the two came a vastly improved tourist scene for Buenos Aires, the glamorous capital of Argentina. Up until the peso crisis of December 2001, Buenos Aires was regarded as Latin America's most expensive city, with some hotel and restaurant prices rivaling those in New York and Paris. Many on the South American tourist crawl avoided this sophisticated and beautiful metropolis, staying in the cheaper capitals of the countries that surrounded it. But now that the peso, once on par with the U.S. dollar, has fallen to less than a third of its former value, visitors from all over the world have been flocking to the Argentine capital, which, in many ways, lives up to its reputation as the Paris of South America. While still remaining reasonably priced in comparison to vacations in the United States, Canada, or Europe, prices have gone up in Buenos Aires, most considerably in terms of hotels and the cost of taxis and other services. Still, it's a relative bargain destination, as the enormous number of travelers and world-recession-escaping expats living here will tell you. Tourism has become the third-most-important component of Argentina's economy, and Buenos Aires receives the majority of its visitors.

With the pending 2010 bicentennial, the capital has tried to renovate its wealth of architecture, much of which dates from nearly a century ago, and there's been an explosion of building and urban expansion in expectation of the Centennial at that time. Stroll through the neighborhoods of Recoleta or Palermo, full of buildings with marble neoclassical facades on broad, tree-lined boulevards, or tour the historic Avenida de Mayo, which was designed to rival Paris's Champs-Elysées. European immigrants to Buenos Aires, mostly from Spain and Italy, brought with them the warm ways of Mediterranean culture, wherein friends, family, and conversation were the most important things in life. Whiling away the night over a long meal was the norm, and locals have always packed into cafes, restaurants, and bars until the early-morning hours.

Since the peso crisis, Argentines became more self-reflective, examining themselves and the reasons why their country fell into so much trouble, and seeking answers. This has led, ironically, to a flourishing of all things Porteño (the word Buenos Aires locals use to describe both themselves and the culture of their city). Unable to import expensive foods from overseas anymore, Buenos Aires's restaurants are concentrating instead on cooking with Argentine staples such as Pampas grass-fed beef, and using locally produced, organic ingredients as seasonings. What has developed is a spectacular array of Argentine nouvelle cuisine of incredible quality and originality. Chefs can't seem to produce it fast enough in the ever-expanding array of restaurants, particularly in the trendy Palermo Viejo district.

Young Argentine designers opened up their own shops and boutiques in the Palermo Hollywood and Palermo Soho neighborhoods. Women, especially, will find fantastic unique fashions, largely at prices lower than in North America and Europe. And when it comes to leather

goods, the buck stops here: The greatest variety and quality in the world are available all over town.

Importantly, the most Porteño thing of all, the tango, has witnessed an explosive growth as well. Until recent years, Argentines had worried that the dance would die out as young people bopped instead to American hip-hop and European techno. But now, new varieties of shows for tourists mean you can see a different form of tango every night of your stay. And, more important to residents, traditional, 1930s-style tango salons, called *milongas,* have opened in spaces all over town. They're drawing not only the older, traditional tango dancers but also young Argentines, who have rediscovered their grandparents' favorite dance, as well as young expats from all over the world who are making Buenos Aires the world's new hot city, the way Prague was at the end of the Cold War.

All of this means there is no time like now to visit Buenos Aires, a city rich in culture still available at a price that won't hurt your wallet. With prices on the upswing and the worldwide recession heading deeper throughout the globe, however, the situation is changing rapidly, so get there soon!

1 ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE International flights arrive at **Ezeiza International Airport** (✆ **11/5480-6111**), located 34km (20 miles) west of downtown Buenos Aires. You can reach the city by shuttle or *remise* (private unmetered taxi); you will see official stands with set fares in the airport once you clear Customs. Taxis from the airport to the center of town cost about $30 to $40 (£20–£27). The number for tourism information at the airport is ✆ **11/4480-0224.** See "Safe Rides," below.

Domestic airlines and flights to Uruguay use **Jorge Newbery Airport** (✆ **11/4514-1515**), located only 15 minutes to the north, along the river from downtown. Taxis and *remises* cost $16 to $25 (£11–£17) to the city center. **Manuel Tienda León** (✆ **11/4314-3636**) is the most reliable transportation company, offering buses and *remises* to and from the airports, starting at about $18 (£12) for bus rides to the city center.

BY BUS The **Estación Terminal de Omnibus,** Av. Ramos Mejía 1680 (✆ **11/4310-0700;** www.tebasa.com.ar), located near Retiro Station, serves all long-distance buses connecting Buenos Aires with the suburbs, the coasts and interior of Argentina, and even international destinations. Rates are very affordable. The station is enormous and confusing, however, so you should give yourself plenty of time for searching for your bus company, buying tickets, and finding your bus.

BY CAR In Buenos Aires, it's easier and safer to travel by *subte* (subway), *remise,* or radio-taxi (radio-dispatched taxis, as opposed to street taxis) than by driving yourself. Rush-hour traffic is chaotic, and parking is difficult. If you do rent a car, park it at your hotel or a nearby garage and leave it there.

CITY LAYOUT

Although Buenos Aires is an expansive city, the main tourist neighborhoods are concentrated in a small, comparatively wealthy part of town that hugs the Río de la Plata. The city's MicroCentro extends from Plaza de Mayo to the south and Plaza San Martín to the north, and from Plaza del Congreso to the west and Puerto Madero to the east. The

Tips Safe Rides

Buenos Aires has its share of dishonest taxi drivers. At both airports, take only officially sanctioned transportation. Do not accept rides from private individuals. Even if freelance taxi drivers approach you offering cheaper fares, play it safe and use the official *remise* stands. For more details, see "Traveling by Taxi," below.

neighborhoods of San Telmo, La Boca, Puerto Madero, Recoleta, and Palermo surround the MicroCentro. The city layout follows a wobbly grid pattern; *avenidas* are the wide boulevards, where most traffic flows and the subways lines generally run; *calles* are narrower one-way streets; and *diagonales* cut across streets and avenues at 45-degree angles, providing beautiful vistas onto many tourist sites. Each city block extends 100m (328 ft.), and building addresses indicate relative location on the street.

The **MicroCentro** includes Plaza de Mayo (the political and historic center of Buenos Aires), Plaza San Martín, and Avenida 9 de Julio, generally claimed to be the widest street in the world. ***Note:*** Addresses on this thoroughfare generally take on those of its parallel service streets, such as Carlos Pellegrini, Lima, Cerrito, and Bernardo de Irogoyen. Most commercial activity is focused in this busy zone, as are the majority of hotels and restaurants. Next to the MicroCentro, the newly renovated riverfront area, called **Puerto Madero,** boasts excellent restaurants and nightlife, as well as new commercial and residential zones. Farther south, **Monserrat, San Telmo,** and **La Boca** are the historic neighborhoods where the first immigrants arrived and *milonga* and tango originated. They are beautiful and loaded with areas of interest to tourists, but take caution if exploring them after sunset.

The city's most European neighborhood, **Recoleta,** offers fashionable restaurants, cafes, and evening entertainment on tree-lined streets. It's home to the city's cultural center, built into a former church, as well as the Recoleta Cemetery, the necropolis where key figures such as Evita and many former presidents are buried. Bordering Recoleta, **Barrio Norte** is famous for its Avenida Santa Fe shopping, cafes, and nightlife. The city's trendiest area, **Palermo,** to the northwest, is a sprawling neighborhood of parks, mansions, and cobblestone streets lined with tiny stucco homes. It is vastly wealthy in some parts and gracefully bohemian in others. Palermo is a catchall term for many neighborhoods in Buenos Aires. Today when most people say Palermo, they are not referring to the wealthy European-style section of the city along Avenida Libertador, sometimes also called **Alto Palermo,** but instead to **Palermo Viejo** and its further subdivisions of **Palermo Hollywood** and **Palermo Soho,** hip parts of the city full of chic restaurants and tiny boutiques owned by young up-and-coming designers. When anyone says "meet me in Palermo," it's crucial to clarify exactly which part of the city they mean.

STREET MAPS At the front desk of your hotel, ask for a copy of "The Golden Map" and *QuickGuide Buenos Aires.* To help you plan your trip before you leave home, the Buenos Aires–based company **De Dios** (www.dediosonline.com) sells laminated street guides, available from Amazon (www.amazon.com).

GETTING AROUND

The Buenos Aires **metro**—called the ***subte***—is the fastest, cheapest way to get around. Buses are also convenient, though less commonly used by tourists. Get maps of metro

and bus lines from tourist offices and most hotels. (Ask for the *QuickGuide Buenos Aires.*) All metro stations are supposed to have maps, but they are rarely in good supply.

BY METRO The *subte* is the fastest and cheapest way to travel in Buenos Aires. Six lines connect commercial, tourist, and residential areas in the city Monday through Saturday from 5am to 11pm, and on Sunday and holidays from 8am to 11pm. These are the official hours, but because of budget cuts, many lines stop running by 10pm. However, they don't always close the stations after the trains have stopped, and you could end up waiting for trains that never come, so ask if a train is running in the direction you need during later hours. Service has also been reduced by lengthening the time between trains, even during busy daytime hours, making for extremely crowded trains. A new line, the H or Yellow Line, has been partially built along the Jujuy-Puerreydon corridor, and existing lines have also been expanded, though work has recently stopped on further extensions. See the inside back cover of this guide for a map of the system, and be aware that new maps given out or posted at stations might not correctly reflect subway extensions.

The flat fare is 90 centavos (30¢/15p). Every station has a staffed ticket window. Some stations have ticket vending machines, but they're unreliable. You can also buy a *subte* pass for 9 pesos ($3/£2.05), valid for 10 trips.

Trains get crowded during rush hours, and cars are not air-conditioned and get unbearably hot in summer. Free subway maps are available upon request, but stations run out of them quickly. Always be cautious of pickpockets, including tiny pocket-height children who can easily be overlooked.

Try to ride the A line at least once; it's a tourist attraction in itself. The oldest line, it runs along Avenida de Mayo using some of the original rickety wooden cars. Lima station, in particular, retains most of the original ornamentation and copies of advertisements from the turn of the 20th century.

Neither Recoleta nor Puerto Madero has *subte* access. Most of Puerto Madero, however, is accessible via the L. N. Alem *subte* stop on the B line. It's a 5- to 20-minute walk, depending on which dock you're going to. (Puerto Madero is a renovated port district that stretches far along the Río de la Plata waterfront downtown.) The D runs through Barrio Norte, which borders Recoleta, so you can save money on taxis by using this line and walking the 15 minutes to that area. Visit www.subte.com.ar for maps before heading to Argentina. The interactive site also gives estimated times and transfer information

Tips Websites for Your Trip

We have included as many useful websites as possible in this section. The Buenos Aires city government site (www.bue.gov.ar) provides additional tourist information, with links to businesses in town and a calendar of events. For tourist maps, check out **www.dediosonline.com**. Subway *(subte)* information is available through the interactive website **www.subte.com.ar**, which offers maps, estimated times, and transfer information between stations. A new website with great self-guided tours of Buenos Aires and shopping tips is **www.welcomeargentina.com**. If your Spanish is excellent, use the Argentine version of Google, **www.google.com.ar**, and click on "Páginas de Argentina" for the latest locally produced online information on Buenos Aires.

Tips Traveling by Taxi

At the risk of sounding repetitive, we strongly recommend that if you need a taxi, you call in advance for a *remise* or radio-taxi (see "By Taxi," above, for numbers). Even better: Ask an employee of your hotel, restaurant, or other venue to call on your behalf, as a representative of that establishment, which ensures greater accountability from drivers. If you must hail taxis off the street, use only those with plastic light boxes on their roofs, indicating that they are radio-taxis. Since the economic crisis began, robberies by street taxi drivers have increased sharply. *Remises* are only slightly pricier than street cabs, but far safer. Most hotels have contracts with *remise* companies, and they're accustomed to calling for patrons.

between stations. Be aware that wildcat strikes are common on the system, though workers rarely stop trains between stations.

BY BUS Buenos Aires has about 140 bus lines that run 24 hours a day. The fare is 90 centavos and up, depending on distance traveled. Pay your fare inside the bus at the electronic ticket machine, which accepts coins only. Many bus drivers will tell you the fare for your destination and direct you where to get off, but most speak Spanish only. Locals are just as helpful and sometimes make an almost comical effort to ensure you don't get lost. The *Guia T* is a comprehensive guide to the city bus grid and bus lines. Buy it at bookstores, newspaper kiosks, or on the *subte* or sidewalk from peddlers.

BY TAXI The streets of Buenos Aires are swarming with taxis. Fares are generally low, with an initial meter reading of 3.80 pesos increasing 38 centavos every 200m (656 ft.) or each minute. *Remises* and radio-taxis are much safer than street taxis (see "Traveling by Taxi," below). Most of what the average tourist needs to see in the city is accessible for $3 to $7 (£2.05–£4.80). Radio-taxis, when hailed on the street, are recognizable by the plastic light boxes on their rooftops, though not all will have them. If a cab is available, the word *libre* will flash in red on the windshield. Ordinary taxis, more likely to be run by members of Buenos Aires's infamous taxi mafia, do not have these special lights at all. I personally have had few problems, but it's always best to err on the side of caution. If you speak English loudly with fellow passengers, identifying yourself as a tourist, expect your ride to take longer than it should, with strange diversions ensuring a higher fare than normal. You can prevent this by being vigilant, having a general idea where you are going, and keeping in mind the one-way street system. Drivers often use traffic problems as their excuse for the runaround. A rarely enforced law means taxi drivers can stop only if their passenger side is facing the curb. If available cabs are ignoring you, cross to the other side of the street and hail again. Though the vast majority of taxi drivers are honest, a substantial number of tourists have been ripped off recently by dishonest drivers. A common scam is saying that you gave a smaller-denomination bill to the driver than you actually have. One way around this is to know in Spanish the value of your bill, and announcing it to the driver when requesting change. (Or make sure to have exact change and lots of coins and small bills.) Tips are not necessary, but many locals normally round up to the nearest peso for the fare. To request a taxi by phone, consider **Taxi Premium** (✆ **11/4374-6666**), the service used by the Four Seasons Hotel.

BY CAR Buenos Aires is not a place where you need a car. We don't advise driving yourself unless you're heading out of the city. If you must rent a car, contact one of the international rental companies at either airport, as well as those listed in the next paragraph. Most hotels can also arrange car rentals. Typically, rental cars are manual, and automatic cars are expensive, running at about $100 (£70) per day. ***Note:*** Most local motorists disregard traffic rules except for one—no turn on red.

Rental cars are available from **Hertz,** Paraguay 1122 (✆ **800/654-3131** in the U.S., or 11/4816-8001); **Avis,** Cerrito 1527 (✆ **800/230-4898** in the U.S., or 11/4300-8201); **Dollar,** Marcelo T. de Alvear 523 (✆ **800/800-6000** in the U.S., or 11/4315-8800); and **Thrifty,** Av. Leandro N. Alem 699 (✆ **800/847-4389** in the U.S., or 11/4315-0777).

ON FOOT You'll probably find yourself walking more than you'd planned in this pedestrian-friendly city. Most of the center is small enough to navigate on foot, and you can connect to adjacent neighborhoods by catching a taxi or using the *subte.* Based on the Spanish colonial plan, the city is a wobbly grid expanding from the Plaza de Mayo, so you are not likely to get too lost. Plazas and parks all over the city supply a wonderful place to rest, people-watch, and meet the locals. Sidewalks are in terrible repair, however, throughout the city, so the important thing is to watch your step at the same time you try to take in all of the local beauty.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The central office of the **City Tourism Secretariat,** responsible for all visitor information on Buenos Aires, is located at Calle Balcarce 360 in Monserrat but is not open to the general public (✆ **11/4313-0187**). Instead, the city uses several kiosks spread in various neighborhoods, which have maps and hotel, restaurant, and attraction information. These are found at J.M. Ortiz and Quintana in Recoleta, Puerto Madero, the central bus terminal, Caminito in La Boca, and Calle Florida 100, where it hits Diagonal Norte. Most are open Monday through Friday from 10am to 5pm, although some open and close later. Others are also open on weekends as well, including the one in San Telmo at Defensa 1250. The center on Caminito in La Boca is open weekends only, usually Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 5pm.

The **Buenos Aires City Tourism Office** runs a hot line for information (✆ **11/4313-0187**) from 7:30am to 6pm Monday to Saturday, and Sunday 11am to 6pm. The city also runs free tours (for details, call ✆ **11/4114-5791** Mon–Fri 10am–4pm). The majority of the tours are in Spanish, but a few are also in English.

When you arrive in Buenos Aires at Eizeza, there is also a central tourism station just outside of Customs run by the **Tourism Secretariat of the Nation,** with information on Buenos Aires and the rest of Argentina. It does not maintain regular hours, but usually maps and other brochures are outside the window in the event it is closed.

Fast Facts Buenos Aires

American Express The huge American Express building is next to Plaza San Martín, at Arenales 707 (✆ **11/4312-1661**). The travel agency is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm; the bank is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm. In addition to card-member services, the bank offers currency exchange (dollars only), money orders, check cashing, and refunds.

Area Code The city area code for Buenos Aires, known locally as a *característica,* is **011.** Drop the 0 when combining numbers from overseas with Argentina's country code, **54.** The number **15** in front of a local number indicates a cellular phone. This will need the addition of the **011** if you're calling from outside Buenos Aires. Cellphones become complicated when dialing from overseas. Dial whatever international code you need from your country (011 from the U.S. and Canada), then 54 for Argentina, then 9 to indicate a cellphone, then the area code of the cellphone, then the number. Thus, to call Buenos Aires cellphones from the U.S., you would dial 011-54-9-11 and then the eight-digit number.

Business Hours Banks are generally open weekdays 10am to 3pm, and ATMs work 24 hours. Shopping hours are Monday through Friday from 9am to 8pm or 10pm, and Saturday from 10am to midnight. Shopping centers are open daily from 10am to 10pm. Most independent stores are closed on Sunday, and some close for lunch. Some kiosks, selling water, candy, and packaged food are open 24 hours. Most neighborhoods have a 24-hour pharmacy, or *locutorio.*

Currency Exchange Although American dollars are often accepted in major hotels and businesses catering to tourists, you will need Argentine pesos for ordinary transactions. Credit cards are widely used, although some businesses charge a small additional fee. It's easiest to exchange money at the airport, your hotel, or an independent exchange house rather than at an Argentine bank. Traveler's checks can be difficult to cash: **American Express** (see above) offers the best rates on its traveler's checks and charges no commission. It offers currency exchange for dollars only. ATMs are plentiful in Buenos Aires, but you should use those only in secure, well-lit locations. At some ATMs, you can withdraw pesos or dollars. Even if your bank allows you to make larger daily withdrawals, Argentine ATMs generally only give out pesos in the value range $100 to $200 maximum at a time or on a daily basis, so plan accordingly if you know you will need large amounts of cash while in Buenos Aires. It will be hard to break large bills usually dispensed by ATMs, so withdraw money in uneven amounts so that a portion comes in small bills. You can have money wired to **Western Union,** Av. Córdoba 975 (✆ **0800/800-3030**).

Embassies & Consulates See "Fast Facts: Argentina" in appendix A.

Emergencies For an **ambulance,** call ✆ **107;** in case of **fire,** call ✆ **100;** for **police** assistance, call ✆ **101;** for an English-speaking hospital, call **Clínica Suisso Argentino** (✆ **11/4304-1081**) or **Hospital Britanico** (✆ **11/4309-6600**).

Language Shops, hotels, and restaurants are usually staffed by at least one or two fluent English speakers, and many people speak at least a few words of English. A rule of thumb though is that less-expensive venues will have fewer, if any, English speakers. However, with the massive influx of tourism since the peso crisis, English has become ubiquitous on the streets of the city and many young people know some of the language.

Post Office You never have to venture more than a few blocks to find a post office, open weekdays from 10am to 8pm and Saturday until 1pm. The main post office, or Correo Central, is at Av. Sarmiento 151 (✆ **11/4891-9191;** www.correoargentino.com.ar). In addition, the post office works with some *locutorios,* which

offer limited mailing services. The purple-signed and ubiquitous **OCA** (✆ **0800/999-7700;** www.oca.com.ar) is a private postal service that can mail items overseas.

Safety If former president George W. Bush's daughters, surrounded by Secret Service and local cops, can still get robbed, as they did in 2006, it says a lot about crime in Buenos Aires. Visitors need to be aware at all times. Crime in Buenos Aires—especially pickpocketing, robberies, and car thefts—has increased sharply in recent years as the economy has collapsed and brought naive tourists searching for bargains. Still it's generally safe to walk around Recoleta, Palermo, and the MicroCentro both day and night. Some tourist areas deemed safe by day, such as La Boca, should be avoided at night. Be careful at night when in San Telmo, especially in outdoor restaurants. Never leave a bag or purse unattended or on the ground. (Though official accounts differ and/or deny the Bush daughters were robbed at all, the method by which they were likely hoodwinked was the "soccer" method: A purse on the ground under a chair is kicked to another thief who then takes it away.) I also would warn tourists against walking around at night in Monserrat, though with increasing gentrification and tourist spillover from San Telmo, the area will continue to become safer. Visitors should walk in pairs or groups when possible and avoid the conspicuous appearance of being a tourist. Do not flaunt expensive possessions, particularly jewelry. Call for a radio-taxi or *remise* when leaving a place of business. The number-one rule is that thieves take advantage of naiveté and opportunity, but real violence is unlikely. Pickpocketing is likely to be your top problem, so be careful in large crowds, subways, and buses, and especially when watching street performers.

Taxes The 21% sales tax (or VAT) is already included in the sales price of your purchase. Foreign tourists are entitled to a VAT tax return for certain purchases over 70 pesos, but you must request a refund check at the time of purchase from participating shops (the shop should display a "Global Refund" logo). Before departing the country, present these refund checks (in voices) to Customs, and then your credit card will be credited for the refund, or you'll receive a check by mail. Be aware when checking into hotels that the posted or spoken price may or may not reflect this tax, so make sure to ask for clarification.

Taxis See "Getting Around," above.

Telephone Unless you are calling from your hotel (which will be expensive), the easiest way to place calls in Buenos Aires is by going to a *locutorio* or *telecentro,* found on nearly every city block. Private glass booths allow you to place as many calls as you like by dialing directly, after which you pay an attendant. A running meter tells you what you'll owe. Most *locutorios* also have fax machines and broadband Internet computers. Calls to the U.S. or Canada run about a peso or less per minute.

Although some coin-operated public phones still exist in Buenos Aires, most require a calling card, available at kiosks, which are specifically branded for the various communication companies. Local calls, like all others, are charged by the minute. Dial ✆ **110** for information and ✆ **000** to reach an international operator. To dial another number in Argentina from Buenos Aires, dial the area code first, then the local number; this applies to cellular numbers too. ***Note:*** If you call someone's cellular phone in Argentina, the call is also charged to you and can cost significantly more than a standard land-line call.

Tipping A 10% to 15% tip is common at cafes and restaurants. Taxis do not require tips, but many people round up to the nearest peso or 50 centavo figure. If a taxi driver helps you with bags, a small tip might be a nice touch.

2 WHERE TO STAY

Though the current economic downturn at the time of this writing will make this subject to change, current international tourism to Buenos Aires has been increasing by as much as 20% a year since the devaluation of the peso. As a result, hotels in Buenos Aires often fill up in high season, so it's more crucial than ever to book ahead. The most convenient hotels are found in Recoleta and the MicroCentro. Recoleta is more scenic and not quite as noisy as the MicroCentro, but you might spend more money on cabs, as it is not near the *subte* lines. Prices listed below are rack rates in high season and include the 21% tax levied on hotel rooms. The prices listed here can differ considerably based on many factors—from type of room, events in the city, views, and the hotel management's discretion, based on overall availability in the city. Do not be surprised if rates vary considerably, up or down, from what I've listed here; many factors can affect the final price, including whether you book online using the Spanish versus the English version of a hotel's website. Discounts are almost always available in low season, and sometimes even in high season. Web packages and specials are also available on various hotel sites. Most hotels charge about $10 to $12 (£7–£8.20) a night for valet parking or, at the very least, recommend nearby self-parking facilities. Luxury hotels charge double that rate. You should avoid parking long-term on the street.

Buenos Aires accommodations have improved tremendously in the past few years, following a series of renovations among many of the city's government-rated four- and five-star hotels. Most five- and four-star hotels in Buenos Aires offer in-room safes, cable TV, direct-dial phones with voice mail, and in-room Internet access for free or at varying prices. Most hotels in this chapter boast four or five stars. Wi-Fi, often free, is standard in the lobbies and public areas of most hotels, including two- and three-star venues.

You love Buenos Aires, and so does everyone else. That means that hotel bargains are much harder to find now. Exponentially increasing numbers of tourists have made available rooms a scarce commodity, and hotels are trending their rates up in accordance. In fact, many hotel prices are back at their pre-peso-crisis levels. Still, bargains can be had—especially from four-star establishments off the beaten path, and locally owned (rather than international) hotel chains. And, of course, every traveler knows never to accept the first price offered. Always ask for a better rate and whether using your AAA card, student ID, or other membership card will net you additional discounts.

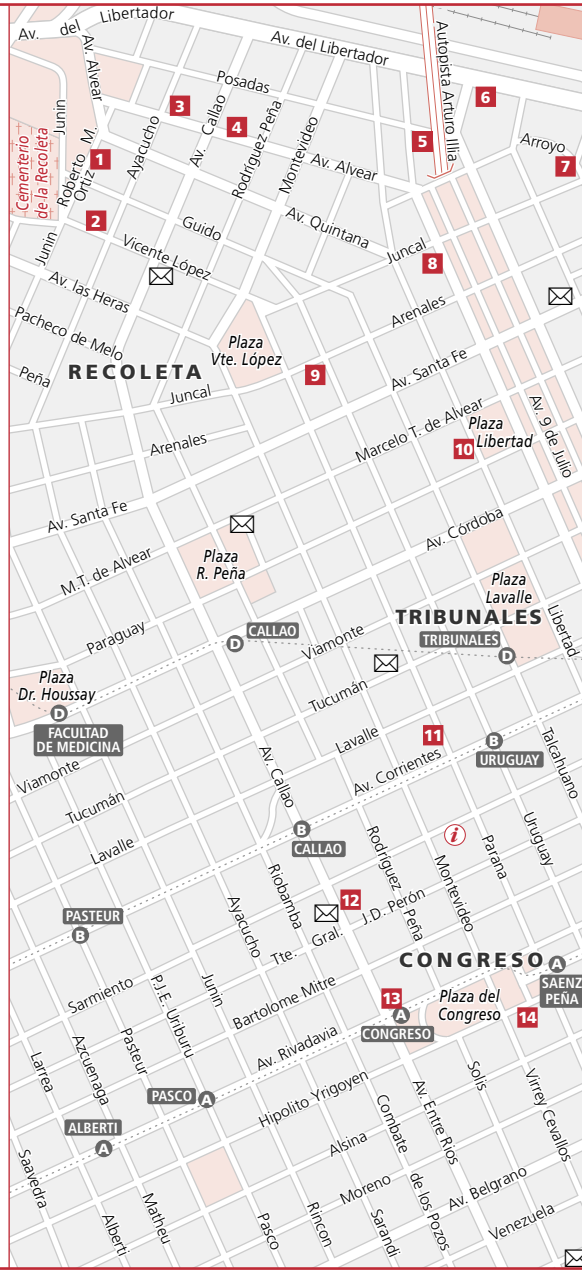
MICROCENTRO

Very Expensive

Marriott Plaza Hotel ★★ The historic Plaza was the grande dame of Buenos Aires for most of the 20th century, and the Marriott management has maintained much of its original splendor. The intimate lobby, decorated in Italian marble, crystal, and Persian carpets, is a virtual revolving door of Argentine politicians, foreign diplomats, and business executives. Twenty-six rooms overlook Plaza San Martín, providing dreamlike views

Where to Stay in Buenos Aires

- Alvear Palace Hotel **3**
- Amerian Buenos Aires Park Hotel **21**
- Auge Buenos Aires **11**
- Bel Air Hotel **9**
- Claridge Hotel **23**
- Dazzler Hotel **10**
- Dolmen Hotel **17**
- El Lugar Gay **36**
- Etoile Hotel **1**
- The Faena Hotel and Universe **32**
- Four Seasons Hotel **5**
- The Golden Tulip Savoy **12**
- Grand Boulevard Hotel **33**
- Hilton Buenos Aires **27**
- Holiday Inn Express **20**
- Hostel Carlos Gardel **35**
- Hotel Castelar **29**
- Hotel Colon **26**
- Hotel de Los Dos Congresos **13**
- Hotel Emperador **6**
- Hotel Ibis **14**
- Hotel Ritz **28**
- Howard Johnson Florida Street **19**
- InterContinental Hotel Buenos Aires **30**
- Lafayette Hotel **24**
- Lina's Tango Guesthouse **34**
- Loi Suites **2**
- Marriott Plaza Hotel **16**
- NH City Hotel **31**
- Pan Americano **25**
- Park Hyatt **4**
- The Recoleta Hostel **8**
- The Regente Palace Hotel **18**
- Sheraton Buenos Aires Hotel and Convention Center **15**
- Sofitel **7**
- V&S Hostel **22**



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Information
Post office
Subway
Subway transfer
Retiro Station
RETIRO
SAN MARTÍN
LAVALLE
FLORIDA
L.N. ALEM
CARLOS PELLEGRINI
Obelisco
DIAGONAL NORTE
9 DE JULIO
CATEDRAL
PLAZA DE MAYO
BOLÍVAR
PERÚ
PIEDRAS
AV. DE MAYO
LIMA
BELGRANO
MORENO
INDEPENDENCIA
Av. del Libertador
Av. Ramos Mejía
San Martín
Av. E. Madero
Av. Antártida Argentina
Darsena Norte
Maipú
Florida
Plaza San Martín
Av.
M.T. de Alvear
Paraguay
Córdoba
MICROCENTRO
Esmeralda
Viamonte
Suipacha
Tucumán
San Martín
Lavalle
C. Pellegrini
CORRIENTES THEATER DISTRICT
Av. Corrientes
Sarmiento
Tte. Gral. J.D. Perón
Reconquista
25 de Mayo
Av. Roque Sáenz Peña
(Diagonal Norte)
C. Bartolome Mitre
Rivadavia
Plaza de Mayo
Libertad
Cerrito
Hipolito Yrigoyen
Alsina
Av. Julio A. Rocha
(Diagonal Sur)
Peru
Bolivar
Defensa
Balcarce
Moreno
Av. Belgrano
Venezuela
Mexico
Chile
Piedras
Chacabuco
Av. Independencia
Av. de Mayo
Santiago del Estero
Salta
Lima
Av. 9 de Julio
San José
Av. Belgrano
Pte. Luis Saenz Peña
Mexico
Chile
Bernardo de Irigoyen
Tacuari
MONSERRAT
SAN TELMO
PUERTO MADERO
Av. Leandro N. Alem
Av. Rosales
Av. de la Rabida
Av. Alicia Moreau de Justo
Av. Paseo Colon
Av. Ing. Huergo
Azopardo
Av. de los Italianos
Av. Macacha Guemes
Mitre Y Vedia
THE ECOLOGICAL RESERVE
Dique No. 4
Dique No. 3
Dique No. 2
Parque Mujeres Argentinas
Estados Unidos
Carlos Calvo
Plaza Dorrego
Humberto Primo
Av. San Juan
Autopista 25 de Mayo
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36

B & B in Buenos Aires = Beautiful & Bargain-Priced

Buenos Aires has a growing number of intimate, chic bed-and-breakfast-type guesthouses for $40 to $100 (£27–£70) a night. Unlike American B&Bs—which are so often fusty and cluttered with bric-a-brac and cats—those in Buenos Aires tend to have hip, young owners with very clean, cosmopolitan taste. Many owners are designers who open their homes to the traveling public. Their places tend to be airy and bright, and many have Spanish-style interior gardens and patios. Unless you demand the ultimate in five-star luxury, many private guesthouses are nicer than hotels charging three or four times the price. You can also get to know the owners and other guests. Many offer weekly or monthly rates.

We recommend **Che Lulu** (www.luluguesthouse.com), between Palermo Soho and Palermo Viejo, as well as the lovely **La Otra Orilla** (www.laotraorilla.com.ar). See individual websites for additional information and prices.

of the green canopy of trees in the spring and summer. The **Plaza Grill** (p. 97) remains a favorite spot for a business lunch and offers a reasonably priced multicourse dinner menu as well. The **Plaza Bar** (p. 152) is among the most famous in the city. The hotel's enormous health club is one of the city's best, with a large heated indoor pool and specialized dance and aerobics rooms. Guests whose rooms are not ready can wait in the special health club lounge, where they can rest and shower. The hotel lobby has free Wi-Fi access, but in-room Internet access costs about $16 (£11) a day, decreasing with the purchase of additional days. The exterior of the hotel, with its historic landmark facade, recently underwent a cleaning and restoration. The hotel also offers free high-quality historical tours of Buenos Aires.

Calle Florida 1005 (at Santa Fe overlooking Plaza San Martín), 1005 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4318-3000.** Fax 11/4318-3008. www.marriott.com. 325 units. $296 (£202) double; from $400 (£273) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking $16 (£11). Metro: San Martín. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; cigar bar; excellent health club w/outdoor pool; exercise room; sauna; concierge; business center; salon; room service; massage; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi in lobby. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

Sofitel ★★★ The first Sofitel in Argentina opened in late 2002. This classy French hotel near Plaza San Martín joins two seven-story buildings to a 20-story neoclassical tower dating from 1929, linked by a glass atrium lobby. The lobby resembles an enormous gazebo, with ficus trees, a giant iron-and-bronze chandelier, an Art Nouveau clock, and marble filling the space. Adjacent to the lobby, you will find an elegant French restaurant, **Le Sud** (p. 97), and the early-20th-century-style Buenos Aires Café. These rooms vary in size, mixing modern French decor with traditional Art Deco; ask for one of the "deluxe" rooms or suites if you're looking for more space. Beautiful marble bathrooms have separate showers and bathtubs and feature Roger & Gallet amenities. Rooms above the eighth floor enjoy the best views, and the 17th-floor suite, *L'Appartement,* covers the whole floor. Many of the staff members speak Spanish, English, and French.

Arroyo 841–849 (at Juncal), 1007 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4131-0000.** Fax 11/4909-1452. www.sofitel.com. 144 units. From $556 (£380) double; from $684 (£467) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; bar; indoor swimming pool; fitness center; concierge; business center; room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Expensive

Claridge Hotel ★ The Claridge is living testimony to the once-close ties betw een England and Argentina. The grand entrance, with its imposing Ionic columns, mimics a London terrace apar tment. The lobb y was r enovated in a classical style with color ed marble. Guest rooms are spacious, tastefully decorated, and equipped with all the amenities expected of a five-star hotel. The restaurant's hunting-themed wood-paneled interior is a registered city landmark, with a good-value menu of carefully prepared international food for as little as $8 (£5.45), and an inviting br eakfast buffet included in the r oom rates. Because it occasionally hosts conventions, the Claridge can become very busy. The rates at this hotel can go do wn significantly during website promotions, pushing it into the moderate category.

Tucumán 535 (at San M artín), 1049 Buenos Air es. ✆ **11/4314-7700.** Fax 11/4314-8022. w ww.claridge.com.ar. 152 units. $125 (£85) double; fr om $176 (£120) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Metro: Florida. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; health club w/heated outdoor pool; exercise room; sauna; concierge; business center; room service; massage; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, safe.

Pan A mericano ★★★ An enormous hotel, the P an Americano faces both the Obelisco and the Teatro Colón, offering conv enient access to tourist sites as w ell as the *subte* lines that conv erge on this par t of to wn. The South Tower rooms are a good siz e, but the N orth Tower r ooms ar e ev en larger, and bathr ooms hav e whirlpool tubs and separate shower units. All r ooms in both to wers come with desks, extra side chairs, and ample closet space. The health club, spa, and sauna, in a thr ee-story glass rooftop structure, giv e the sense of floating abo ve Avenida 9 de J ulio. The health club r estaurant, **Kasuga,** becomes a sushi bar at night. Two other r estaurants ar e located in the lobb y. **Lucíernaga,** the main lobby bar where breakfast is served, is enormous, but the space has an intimate feeling due to its niche-filled lay out and Jacobean tapestry-upholstered furniture. **Tomo I** has a modern decor . Both spaces ser ve international, Argentine, and Italian cuisine.

Carlos P elligrini 551 (at C orrientes), 1009 Buenos Air es. ✆ **11/4348-5115.** F ax 11/4348-5250. w ww.panamericano.us. 386 units. $217 (£148) double; fr om $300 (£205) suit e. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free valet parking. Metro: Lavalle or Diagonal Nor te. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; enormous health club w/indoor/out door pool; ex ercise room; spa; sauna; c oncierge; business c enter; r oom service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed I nternet, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

Sheraton Buenos A ires Hotel and C onvention Center ★ Across from Retiro train station and the British Clock Tower, the Sheraton has an ideal location for business travelers and tourists alike. R ooms ar e large, and all r ecently r eceived ne w S heraton trademarked Suite Sleeper bedding. The lobb y is v ery busy, serving as a hub for many activities and stor es. A ne w interactive game and business center combination ar ea was also installed in 2006, called Link@S heraton. The hotel boasts four r estaurants that it shares with the P ark Tower, including **Crystal G arden,** ser ving r efined international cuisine in an atrium dining r oom overlooking Alem; **El Aljibe,** cooking Argentine beef from the grill; **Cardinale,** offering I talian specialties; and **Café Express,** a fast-food and pastry shop off the lobby. Its "Neptune" pool and fitness center are among the best in the city. The entire pool and spa complex is set in a gar den, giving the sense of being in a resort, rather than in the hear t of the city. One of the pools also contains a pr essurized current to boost your workout during your swim.

Av. San Martín 1225 (at Leandro N. Alem), 1104 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4318-9000.** Fax 11/4318-9346. www.sheraton.com. 742 units. $247 (£169) double; from $660 (£451) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Metro: Retiro. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; snack bar; piano bar; 2 pools; putting green; 2 lighted tennis courts; fitness center; wet and dry saunas; concierge; activities desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; salon; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Moderate

Amerian Buenos Aires Park Hotel ★★ Finds One of the best four-star hotels in the city, the modern Amerian is a good bet for tourists as well as business travelers. The warm atrium lobby looks more like California than Argentina, and the highly qualified staff offers personalized service. Rooms are elegant and include wood, marble, and granite. All have comfortable beds, chairs, and work areas. The Argentine-owned hotel is just blocks away from Calle Florida, Plaza San Martín, and the Teatro Colón.

Reconquista 699 (at Viamonte), 1003 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/5032-5100.** Fax 11/5032-5101. www.amerian.com. 152 units. $175 (£120) double; from $250 (£171) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $12 (£8.20). Metro: Florida. **Amenities:** Restaurant; pub; exercise room; sauna; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar.

Dolmen Hotel ★ This four-star hotel, centrally located 1 block from Plaza San Martín, offers two things you usually do not find in this price category—quiet and a heated indoor swimming pool. Bathrooms are large, with spacious counters, and well stocked with supplies. A few of the recently renovated rooms are also suitable for those with special needs. Suites offer considerably more space for only a little more money than the standard rooms. Head upstairs to the pool and gym area for great views. The lobby bar, recessed in a space behind the concierge, offers another quiet retreat, with a splashy marble-and-brass decor.

Suipacha 1079 (at Santa Fe), 1003 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4315-7117.** Fax 11/4315-5666. www.hoteldolmen.com.ar. 146 units, including 22 suites. From $133 (£91) double; from $194 (£133) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Metro: San Martín. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small heated indoor swimming pool; small health club; sauna; concierge; business center; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Holiday Inn Express Puerto Madero ★ This hotel enjoys a convenient location across from Puerto Madero's restaurants and nightlife. The location, within the city's downtown core and bank buildings, is convenient for tourists as well as business people. Guest rooms have large, firm beds; ample desk space; and oversize TVs. Ask for a room facing Puerto Madero for the best views over the Río de la Plata. If you get the city-view side, you can always head to the 24-hour gym on the roof of the building, which has a view to everything.

Av. Leandro N. Alem 770 (at Viamonte), 1057 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4311-5200.** Fax 11/4311-5757. www.holiday-inn.com. 116 units. From $154 (£105) double; $220 (£150) suite. Children 17 and under stay free in parent's room. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Metro: L. N. Alem. **Amenities:** Deli; 24-hr. rooftop gym; whirlpool; sauna; business center; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet.

Hotel Colón This hotel is in the heart of the city, on Avenida 9 de Julio overlooking the Obelisco, which gives guests here convenient access to virtually all of the city's *subte* lines. Corner rooms are more spacious, and many of the very large suites come with terraces. The hotel rooms were recently renovated, some with a creamy white decor. Bathrooms are very large, and some of the suite bathrooms have Jacuzzis. The restaurant offers

international cuisine and a wrapar ound vie w o verlooking the O belisco. There is a medium-size heated rooftop pool, but its location in the back of the building means ther e is no view from up here.

Carlos Pellegrini 507 (at Corrientes), 1009 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4320-3500.** Fax 11/4320-3507. www.colon-hotel.com.ar. 173 units , including 35 suit es. F rom $165 (£113) double; fr om $225 (£154) suit e. R ates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $12 (£8.20). Metro: Carlos Pellegrini or 9 de Julio. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar ; pool; small health club; c oncierge; business c enter; 24-hr. r oom ser vice; laundr y service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Howard Johnson F lorida Str eet ★★ Value Having taken o ver this pr operty from Cour tyard b y M arriott, this H oward J ohnson is an ex cellent choice for trav elers who don't require many special services. It has a great location off Calle Florida near Plaza San Martín, with access thr ough a shopping-and-restaurant gallery on the gr ound level. Guest rooms come equipped with sleeper chairs (in addition to the bed), large desks and dressers, and w ell-appointed bathr ooms. R oom siz e is abo ve av erage in this categor y. Each room has two phones, and local calls and I nternet use are free—a rarity in B uenos Aires. There's a small, air y cafe and bar in the lobb y, with additional food ser ved in the gallery below. F our small budget-priced function r ooms off the lobb y ar e available for business and social ev ents. The hotel also adv ertises extensively as gay-friendly. There is no pool or health club on pr emises, but access is offer ed fr ee of charge to a nearb y facility.

Calle Florida 944 (at Alvear), 1005 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4891-9200.** Fax 11/4891-9208. www.hojoar.com. 77 units. $157 (£107) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Metro: San Martín. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; business services; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; conference center; Wi-Fi in lobby. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, large safe.

Lafayette Hotel ★ Kids Popular with E uropean and B razilian travelers, the Lafay-ette Hotel has spacious r ooms, with some ev en large enough to accommodate an entir e family. Each has a desk, and all rooms have Wi-Fi. Bathrooms are hit-or-miss—some are large, others seem like jammed-together after thoughts. S treet-side r ooms ar e gr eat for people-watching in the MicroCentro, though you should expect some noise. Back rooms are quieter but offer limited vie ws. The location is ideal for M icroCentro's Lavalle and Calle Florida shopping, and the sub way is only a fe w blocks away. The buffet br eakfast is generous and varied, offering made-to-or der omelets on r equest. The hotel is built in two par ts with two differ ent elev ator bays, so if y ou're staying with friends or family , request rooms in the same division of the hotel. A tiny new 24-hour gym and sauna also opened in the building's basement, along with a ne w lobby renovation.

Reconquista 546 (at Viamonte), 1003 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4393-9081.** Fax 11/4322-1611. www.lafayette hotel.com.ar. 83 units, including 2 suites. From $168 (£115) double; from $300 (£205) suite. Rates include generous buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Metro: Florida. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; fitness room; sauna; concierge; small business c enter; r oom ser vice; laundr y ser vice; dr y cleaning . *In r oom:* A/C, T V, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

NH Florida This is a simple, well-located, four-star hotel less than a block away fr om the Galerías Pacífico. It opened in 2001 in an older apartment hotel, but the original old building was completely gutted. Views are not the focus at NH F lorida, surrounded by buildings of the same siz e, but the r ooms ar e larger than most in this price categor y. Almost all have wood floors with small carpets, adding a simple elegance to the modern decor. All rooms have free high-speed Internet access and a good wor kstation. Suites are much larger, with large doors to wall off the guest ar eas from the sitting r oom. At the time of this writing, this hotel had plans to expand b y adding ne w r ooms on the first

floor. The hotel offers many good services, but its main disadvantage, compared to other accommodations in this category, is its lack of a gym or pool. However, for a fee of about $10 (£7) per day, clients can access nearby facilities. Eleven rooms are equipped for those with special needs, but I r ecommend calling and asking specific questions about y our needs before booking here. With its MicroCentro location, this is among the most accessible hotels in B uenos Aires.

San Martín 839 (at C órdoba), 1004 Buenos Air es. ✆ **11/4321-9850.** Fax 11/4321-9875. w ww.nh-hotels.com. 148 units , including 20 suit es. $156 (£107) double; fr om $170 (£116) suit e. Rates include buff et breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking $12 (£8.20). M etro: San M artín. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; concierge; business c enter; room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; r ooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Inexpensive

V&S Hostel ★★ Finds Privately owned, but part of an Argentine networ k of hostels, V&S pr ovides ex ceptionally friendly ser vice in a conv enient M icroCentro location. The hostel is inside a gorgeous turn-of-the-20th-centur y apar tment building, with lavish touches such as cur ved doorway entries, stained-glass ornamentation, and balconies. F ive private bedrooms with attached shower-stall bathrooms are also available. A kitchen is available for making meals. G uests can mingle in the quiet librar y, TV sitting r oom, or patio. Several computers are also available for Internet access. This place is a great value, with air-conditioning throughout the r ooms, though they charge an electricity fee of about $1 to $3 (70p–£2.05) a person depending on the r oom. Except for same-day r eservations, the hostel prefers reservation requests are done by e-mail at reservas@hostelclub.com.

Viamonte 887 (at Suipacha), 1053 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4322-0994.** www.hostelclub.com. 60 bed spaces, including 10 in 6 bedrooms with attached bathroom. From $15 (£10) per bed; $78 (£53) per private room. Rates include c ontinental br eakfast. No cr edit cards. Metro: Lavalle. **Amenities:** Concierge; high-speed Internet; Wi-Fi; shared kitchen; lockers. *In room:* A/C (for a small fee), Wi-Fi (select rooms), hair dryer.

MONSERRAT

Expensive

InterContinental ★★★ This luxurious to wer hotel was built in one of the city 's oldest districts, Monserrat, and decorated in the Argentine style of the 1930s.The marble lobby is beige and apricot, with heavy black and brass accents, and handsome car ved-wood furniture and antiques inlaid with agates and other stones. The lobby's small Café de las L uces sometimes offers ev ening tango per formances. The InterContinental is the only five-star in walking distance to the San Telmo tango district. The **Restaurante y Bar Mediterráneo** (p. 102) ser ves healthful, gourmet M editerranean cuisine on an outdoor patio under a glassed-in tr ellis. Stop by the B rasco & D uane wine bar for an ex clusive selection of Argentine vintages. G uest r ooms continue the 1930s theme, with elegant black woodwork, comfy king-size beds, marble-top nightstands, large desks, and black-and-white photographs of the city . Marble bathrooms have separate sho wers and bathtubs, and extensive amenities.

Moreno 809 (at P iedras), 1091 Buenos Air es. ✆ **11/4340-7100.** Fax 11/4340-7119. w ww.buenos-aires.interconti.com. 312 units . $217 (£148) double; fr om $435 (£297) suit e. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $20 (£14). Metro: M oreno. **Amenities:** Restaurant; wine bar ; lobby bar; health club w/indoor pool; ex ercise room; sauna; concierge; business center; room service; massage; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive floors; sun deck. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

NH City Hotel ★★ The Spanish-owned NH hotel chain opened this property in the old City Hotel, an Art Deco masterpiece whose jagged ziggurat exterior calls to mind Jazz

Age New York more than Argentina. Its lobby has been meticulously renovated, a combination of Art Deco and collegiate Gothic, with simple beige and brown furnishings offsetting the burnished woods, stained-glass ceiling, and honey-colored marble floors. Many of the large rooms are on the dark side, with a masculine combination of simple materials in red and black. Others are brighter, with white walls and burnt-sienna offsets. All the bathrooms are spacious, with large counters and an excellent range of toiletries. A new building was also added to the hotel in 2006. The rooftop, with its small outdoor heated pool, offers a view of the river all the way to Uruguay on a clear day. A small health club, complete with a spa, sauna, and Jacuzzi, is also on this level, as is the executive area. The hotel's downside is that many back rooms have no view. There are two restaurants in the building. One is casual, while the other, **Clue,** is a large, minimalist space, with 1930s style, where patrons are forbidden from dining in shorts.

Bolívar 160 (at Alsina), 1066 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4121-6464.** Fax 11/4121-6450. www.nh-hotels.com. 369 units, including 38 suites. From $199 (£136) double; from $296 (£202) suite. Rates include generous buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $20 (£14). Metro: Bolívar or Plaza de Mayo. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; small gym facility w/open-air pool; spa; sauna; Jacuzzi; concierge; business center; room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive floor; conference center. *In room:* TV, high-speed Internet or Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, large safe.

Moderate

Grand Boulevard Hotel ★ (Value) The Grand Boulevard offers a location similar to the InterContinental (see above) at a much lower price, while still offering a convenient set of services for both business and leisure travelers. Double-glazed windows lock out noise from Avenida 9 de Julio while offering incredible views of that street and the river from higher floors. The restaurant/bar is open 24 hours, and it offers both international cuisine and a special lighter menu. All rooms offer desks and have large closets. Subway access is easy. With the *autopista* (highway) nearby, this is also the city's closest four-star hotel to the airport. Parking is free in the hotel's garage. Some of the rooms here have limited wheelchair accessibility. A small, glassed-in meeting-room space sits on the roof of the building, with beautiful views of the city.

Bernardo de Irogoyen 432 (at Belgrano), 1072 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/5222-9000.** www.grandboulevardhotel.com. 85 units. $121 (£83) double; from $175 (£120) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Metro: Moreno. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small health club w/personal trainer; sauna; concierge; business center; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet or Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Hotel Castelar The 1929 Hotel Castelar was once a popular stopping point for Spanish literary stars during Argentina's golden years as an intellectual center in the 1930s. It is most associated with Spanish playwright Federico García Lorca, who took refuge here during the Spanish Civil War for several months in 1934. The room he lived in has also been preserved as a kitschy mini-museum. The lobby retains much of the brass, marble, and heavy plaster elements dating back to its opening.These details extend into the dining area, which was once a *confitería* (cafe) as culturally important as the Café Tortoni (p. 100). Mario Palanti, the eccentric architect of the nearby Palacio Barolo, designed the Castelar. The Castelar's spa, in the hotel's basement, is free for all guests of the hotel (men and women are separated in this area), with additional fees for various services. Enormous, full of white Carrara marble, and built in the Turkish style, it is worth paying the entrance fee of about $15 (£10) just to see the place, even if you are not a hotel guest. Renovations in all of the units were completed in early 2005, but the 1920s wooden touches, speckled glass, and tiled bathroom floors were retained. The

rooms are not very large, but the setup—a small antechamber with the bedroom to one side, the bathroom to the other—adds a sense of privacy to the spaces, even when shared by a couple. Suites are similar, but with an added living area.

Av. de Mayo (at Lima and Av. 9 de Julio), 1152 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4383-5000.** Fax 11/4383-8388. www.castelarhotel.com.ar. 151 units, including 70 suites. $150 (£103) double; $225 (£154) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $12 (£8.20). Metro: Lima. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small health club; extensive spa; business services; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi; rooms for those w/limited mobility (minimal accommodation). *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar.

Inexpensive

Hotel Ritz ★ This is one of my favorite bargain hotels in Buenos Aires, due to its price, the warmth of the staff, and its location at the juncture of 9 de Julio and Avenida de Mayo. Of the 38 rooms, 30 are large enough for doubles or triples, and 24 rooms have balconies facing the street (anyone who saw the really awful movie *Testosterone,* starring Antonio Sabato, Jr., and Sonia Braga, will recognize the balconies). High ceilings in many rooms maintain intricate plaster work, French doors, and brass fixtures. The bathrooms are hit-or-miss—some have only showers with low water pressure. Wi-Fi is free in the breakfast room. The maids here are very much like second mothers overseeing your stay in Buenos Aires. There is an elevator, but staircases lead to it, making it hard to access for those with limited mobility. Most of the clients are Europeans or Argentines on business but on a budget. Rooms do not have safes, but front desk staff will guard valuables and arrange side trips and city tours as well.

Av. de Mayo 1111 (at 9 de Julio), 1085 Buenos Aires. ✆/fax **11/4383-9001.** 38 units. From $50 (£34) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Off-site parking $12 (£8.20). Metro: Lima. **Amenities:** Concierge; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; small meeting center; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV.

PUERTO MADERO

There are no convenient metro stops to this neighborhood.

Very Expensive

The Faena Hotel and Universe ★★★ The Faena opened to much fanfare among fashionistas in October 2004, with its Philippe Starck design and handsome, camera-ready owner, who gave the hotel his name. The hotel is built into El Porteño, an old grain silo, and feels like a resort within the city. In the public spaces, decayed Edwardian elegance meets country chic—with tin metal sheeting, peeling paint, new ornamental plaster ceiling molding made to look old. Many original elements of the grain building were maintained. In the rooms, midcentury classical meets modern—with white Empire-style furnishings in modern surroundings, and cut-glass mirrors reminiscent of colonial Mexico. White and red are key color elements throughout the oversize rooms, with interesting touches such as heavy velvet curtains controlled electronically. Each room has a home entertainment center. Bathrooms are enormous, completely mirrored, outfitted with oversize tubs. Some of the rooms facing the city skyline and the port have incredible vistas; others overlook the nearby Ecological Reserve and the Río de la Plata. The Faena was designed as a sort of resort within the confines of the city. The spa is spacious and unique, using the round shapes of the silos to great effect, with Turkish-style *hammam* baths and a special stone Incan-style sauna shaped like an igloo. Guests also receive free private transfers from the airport.

Martha Salotti 445 (at Av. Juana Manso), 1107 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4010-9000.** Fax 11/4010-9001. www.faenahotelanduniverse.com. 103 units, including 14 suites and 20 apts of varying size, space, and price. From $600 (£410) double; from $865 (£591) suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Parking

$24 (£16). No metro access. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 bars; outdoor heated pool; large health club; spa w/extensive treatments; large sauna w/unique elements; business center w/secretarial services; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, home theater TV, high-speed Internet, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, large safe, individualized bath treatments.

Expensive

Hilton Buenos Aires ★★ The Hilton opened in mid-2000 as the first major hotel and convention center in Puerto Madero. Within easy walking distance of some of the best restaurants in Buenos Aires, it's an excellent choice for steak and seafood connoisseurs. The strikingly contemporary hotel—a sleek silver block hoisted on stilts—features a seven-story atrium with more than 400 well-equipped guest rooms. Spacious guest rooms offer multiple phone lines, walk-in closets, and bathrooms with separate showers and tubs. Those staying on the executive floors receive complimentary breakfast and have access to a private concierge. The lobby restaurant, **El Faro,** serves California cuisine with a focus on seafood. The hotel has the largest in-hotel convention center in the city.

Av. Macacha Güemes 351 (at Malecón Pierina Dealessi), 1106 Buenos Aires. ✆ **800/445-8667** in the U.S. or 11/4891-0000. Fax 11/4891-0001. www.buenos.hilton.com. 418 units. From $265 (£181) double; from $568 (£388) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $24 (£16). No metro access. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; modern gym facility w/open-air pool and a service of light snacks and beverages; concierge; business center and secretarial services; room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

RECOLETA

There are no convenient metro stops to this neighborhood.

Very Expensive

Alvear Palace Hotel ★★★ In the center of the upscale Recoleta district, the Alvear Palace is the most exclusive hotel in Buenos Aires and one of the top hotels in the world. A gilded classical confection full of marble and bronze, the Alvear combines Empire- and Louis XV–style furniture with exquisite French decorative arts. After a long process, the historically important facade was restored in 2004 to its original glory. The illustrious guest list has included Antonio Banderas, Donatella Versace, the emperor of Japan, and Robert Duvall, to name a few. Recently renovated and expanded guest rooms combine modern conveniences with luxurious comforts, such as chandeliers, Egyptian cotton linens, and silk drapes. All rooms come with personal butler service, cellphones that can be activated on demand, fresh flowers and fruit baskets, and daily newspaper delivery. Large marble bathrooms contain Hermès toiletries, and most have Jacuzzi tubs. The formal hotel provides sharp, professional service, and the excellent concierges go to great lengths to accommodate guest requests. The Alvear Palace is home to one of the best restaurants in South America (**La Bourgogne;** p. 104) and offers an excellent, expensive Sunday brunch and afternoon tea in **L'Orangerie.** Kosher catering and dining is also available at the Alvear.

Av. Alvear 1891 (at Ayacucho), 1129 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4808-2100.** Fax 11/4804-0034. www.alvearpalace.com. 200 units (100 palace rooms and 100 suites). From $478 (£327) double; from $539 (£369) suite. Rates include luxurious buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. No metro access. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; small health club; spa; concierge; elaborate business center; shopping arcade; room service; massage; laundry service; dry cleaning; private butler service. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Buenos Aires Park Hyatt ★★★ This hotel combines a modern tower connected to the Palacio Duhau, a mansion once owned by the powerful Duhau family. Mansion rooms mix modern and classical details. Within the tower, the color palette is leather

browns, charcoals, and silver-grays. Rooms are spacious, and suites come with extra bathrooms for use during business meetings. Some tower rooms have breathtaking views of the Río de la Plata. Bathrooms in both buildings are enormous.

One of the hotel restaurant/bars is in the **Piano Nobile;** another is the **Oak Bar,** masculine and Gothic, with a fine selection of liquors, and one of the few bars in Buenos Aires with smoke filtration. The walls are made from panels that originally adorned a medieval Normandy palace. **Gioia** offers modern Italian cuisine for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; and the **Duhau Restaurant,** international with French touches, is open for lunch and dinner. The layered garden in between the two buildings, with gently cascading water-lily-filled pools, is a pleasant place for a drink.

Within the spaces connecting the buildings underground, a wine-and-cheese bar stocks about 45 artisanal cheeses produced in Argentina, along with wine to enhance the selection. The spa, called Ahin, offers a range of treatments beginning at about $120 (£82) to nearly $400 (£274). The gym houses a large heated swimming pool. Internet access is also available in all the rooms, beginning at $12 (£8.20) a day and decreasing with multiday purchases. All public areas of the hotel have Wi-Fi. Breakfast, a huge multicourse spread, is not always included in the rates and runs about $20 (£14) per day.

Av. Alvear 1661 (at Montevideo), 1014 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/5171-1234.** Fax 11/5171-1235. www.buenosaires.park.hyatt.com. 165 units, including 23 mansion units, 23 suites in both towers. $575 (£393) double; from $756 (£517) suite; from $1,119 (£765) select suites. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking $24 (£16). No metro access. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; lobby bar; heated indoor pool; exercise room; health club; sauna; concierge; multilingual business center; salon; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, high-speed Internet, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Four Seasons Hotel ★★★ Kids This landmark hotel consists of two parts—the 12-story "Park" tower housing the majority of the guest rooms, and the 1916 French-style "La Mansión," with seven elegant suites and a handful of private-event rooms. A French-style garden and a pool separate the two buildings, and a well-equipped health club offers spa treatments, including a wine massage and facial. The spa is named Pachamama, in honor of the Native earth goddess, and treatments utilize wine and other Argentine ingredients. The hotel's restaurant, **Le Mistral** (p. 105), serves excellent Mediterranean cuisine in a casual environment. Spacious guest rooms offer atypical amenities such as walk-in closets, wet and dry bars, stereo systems, and cellphones. Large marble bathrooms contain separate water-jet bathtubs and showers. Guests on the executive Library Floor enjoy exclusive check-in and checkout; additional in-room amenities including a printer, fax machine, Argentine wine, complimentary breakfast, and evening cocktails; and a private lounge. Attentive staff will assist you in arranging day tours of Buenos Aires, as well as access to golf courses, tennis, boating, and horseback riding. Kids receive bedtime milk and cookies. While there's big competition around the corner at the Park Hyatt, the Four Seasons holds its own and continues to win top honors from *Condé Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure,* and other magazines. A favorite hotel of many celebrities, it's most famous as Madonna's choice while filming *Evita* and again on her 2008 tour.

Posadas 1086–88 (at Av. 9 de Julio), 1011 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4321-1200.** Fax 11/4321-1201. www.fourseasons.com. 165 units, including 49 suites (7 suites in La Mansión). $545 (£373) double; from $750 (£513) suite; $3,500 (£2,395) mansion suite. Prices include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. No metro access. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lobby bar; heated outdoor pool; exercise room; health club; sauna; concierge; multilingual business center; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive level. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, high-speed Internet, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Expensive

Hotel Emperador ★★ Located on Avenida Libertador, this hotel is Spanish owned, with a sister hotel in M adrid. It opened a fe w blocks fr om the P atio Bullrich shopping center in an area some would call Retiro, because it is near the train station complex, and others would call Recoleta. The theme here is "Empire with a modern update." A bust of Julius Caesar overlooks the concierge desk. Behind the main restaurant, the lobby opens onto a large o vergrown patio with a gaz ebo and outdoor seating. The English-hunting-lodge-style lobby bar is a place for ladies who lunch and for businesspeople to gather for informal discussions. The imperial theme continues in the spacious r ooms. Royal-blue carpets with wreath patterns, and elegant furnishings with rich veneers, brass fittings, and gold v elvet upholster y await visitors. The suites, with their walls, multiple doors and entrances, and extra sinks, are ideal for doing business without encroaching on the sleeping quarters. All bathrooms are oversize, with cream-and-green marble. Each room comes with a large desk and high-speed I nternet and Wi-Fi access, which will cost y ou about $12 (£8.20) a day. The gym is small, with a wet and dry sauna and separate areas for men and women. A medium-size heated indoor swimming pool is also her e; with the space's modern columns, it gives the impression of a Roman bath.

Av. del Liber tador 420 (at Suipacha), 1001 Buenos Air es. ✆ **11/4131-4000.** Fax 11/4131-3900. w ww.hotel-emperador.com.ar. 265 units , including 36 suit es. $250 (£171) double; fr om $400 (£274) suit e; $1,000 (£684) nuptial suit e. Buffet breakfast $24 (£16). AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking $12 (£8.20). M etro: Retiro. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small fitness c enter w/medium-size indoor heat ed pool and sauna; concierge; business c enter; r oom ser vice; massage; bab ysitting; laundr y ser vice; dr y cleaning; gar den patio. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, Wi-Fi, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe.

Loi Suites ★★ Part of a small local hotel chain, the Loi Suites Recoleta is a contemporary hotel with spacious r ooms and personalized service. A palm-filled gar den atrium and covered pool adjoin the lobby, which is bathed in various shades of white. Breakfast and afternoon tea are served in the "winter garden." Management uses the term "suites" rather loosely to describe rooms with microwaves, sinks, and small fridges. But the hotel does offer some traditional suites in addition to its regular studio-style rooms. Loi Suites lies just around the corner from Recoleta's trendy restaurants and bars, and the staff will provide information on city tours upon r equest. In-room Internet is fr ee, and ther e are also CD players.

Vicente L ópez 1955 (at A yacucho), 1128 Buenos Air es. ✆ **11/5777-8950.** F ax 11/5777-8999. w ww.loisuites.com.ar. 112 units. From $300 (£204) double; from $450 (£305) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $12 (£8.20). No metr o access. **Amenities:** Restaurant; indoor pool; ex ercise room; sauna; small business c enter; r oom ser vice; laundr y ser vice; dr y cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, fridge, hair dryer, safe, CD players.

Moderate

Bel Air Hotel Opened in late 2000, the intimate B el Air has the ambience of a boutique hotel, and though reasonable for the location, it's no longer the bargain it once was. Although the lobby and building's exterior are more extravagant than the r ooms, guests can still look forward to comfortable, quiet accommodations. Superior rooms are bigger than standards and only slightly mor e expensive, and suites hav e separate sitting ar eas. Certain rooms contain sho wers only (no tubs). N ext to the lobb y, **Bis-a-Bis** restaurant and bar featur es windo w-side tables, gr eat for people-watching along the fashionable Calle Arenales.

Arenales 1462 (at P araná), 1061 Buenos Air es. ✆ **11/4021-4000.** Fax 11/4816-0016. w ww.hotelbelair.com.ar. 76 units. $150 (£102) double; from $230 (£156) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC,

V. No parking. Metro: Callao. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; gym; business services; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, safe.

Etoile Hotel ★ (Value) In the heart of Recoleta, steps from the neighborhood's fashionable restaurants and cafes, the 14-story Etoile is an older hotel with Turkish flair. It's not as luxurious as the area's other five-star venues, but it's not as expensive, either—making it a good value for the neighborhood. Colored in gold and cream, guest rooms are fairly large—although they're not really "suites," as the hotel describes them. Executive rooms have separate sitting areas, large tile-floor bathrooms with whirlpool tubs, and balconies. Rooms facing south have balconies overlooking Plaza Francia and the Recoleta Cemetery.

Roberto M. Ortiz 1835 (at Guido overlooking Recoleta Cemetery), 1113 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4805-2626.** Fax 11/4805-3613. www.etoile.com.ar. 96 units. $145 (£98) double; from $190 (£129) suite. Buffet breakfast $10 (£6.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. No metro access. **Amenities:** Restaurant; rooftop health club w/indoor pool; exercise room; concierge; executive business services; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, hair dryer.

Inexpensive

The Recoleta Hostel ★ (Finds) This is a great inexpensive choice for young people who want to be in a beautiful neighborhood close to everything, but can't ordinarily afford such a location. Accommodations are simple, with 22 bunk bed–filled rooms for 8 to 12 people each. Two double rooms with private bathrooms can also be rented, but they have bunk beds, too, so couples wishing to cozy up will have to get really cozy. Rooms are simple, with bare floors and walls, beds, and a small wooden desk in the private rooms. The decor is reminiscent of a convent. Public areas have high ceilings, and there is a public kitchen, a TV room, laundry service, lockers, and an outdoor patio.

Libertad 1216 (at Juncal), 1012 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4812-4419.** Fax 11/4815-6622. www.trhostel.com.ar. 75 bed spaces, including 4 in 2 bedrooms with private bathroom. From $11 (£7.45) per bed; $45 (£30) per private room. Rates include continental breakfast. No credit cards. Metro: Lavalle. **Amenities:** Concierge; high-speed Internet; Wi-Fi; shared kitchen; outdoor patio; lockers. *In room:* Hair dryer.

SAN TELMO

Inexpensive

El Lugar Gay ★ This is Buenos Aires's first exclusively gay hotel, but it is open only to men. It's inside a historic turn-of-the-last-century building less than a block from Plaza Dorrego, the heart of San Telmo. It has a homey feeling, with industrial chic well blended into a century-old interior. Nestor and Juan, the gay couple who own the building, run a friendly staff, but most don't speak much English. Ask for the rooms in the back with the beautiful views of the Church of San Telmo, which is beside the building. Rooms are small and sparse. Some share bathrooms with adjacent rooms, but one group has a Jacuzzi. Rooms do not have phones, but some have small desks or tables for use as workstations. Several flights of narrow stairs leading to the hotel's lobby and rooms might be a problem for people with limited mobility. The hotel becomes a de facto gay community center at times, with its small cafe and Sunday evening tango lessons at 7pm, conducted by the gay tango group La Marshall. These are open to the public, so even if you don't stay here, you can still visit.

Defensa 1120 (at Humberto I), 1102 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4300-4747.** www.lugargay.com.ar. 7 rooms, some with shared bathrooms. From $35–$55 (£24–£37) double. Rates include continental breakfast. No credit cards. Metro: Independencia. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; business center. *In room:* A/C, TV, small safe.

Hostel Carlos Gardel ★ If you can't get enough of Gardel in the tango clubs, then stay here, where a red wall full of his pictures is the first thing to greet you. This hostel is built into a renovated old house, and though it has been severely gutted, a few charming elements such as marble stair cases, wall sconces, and stained-glass windows remain. Two rooms with private bathrooms are available in this location; at $50 (£28), they are reasonably priced but have few amenities other than a bathroom. The staff is friendly, and a large TV room off the concierge area allows for chatting with them and other patrons. A shared kitchen and an *asado* on the rooftop terrace provide more spaces for interacting and sharing stories of your adventures in Buenos Aires. Towels and sheets are provided for guests, but of all the hostels, this seems to have the fewest bathrooms for the number of guests.

Carlos Calvo 579 (at Perú), 1102 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4307-2606.** www.hostelcarlosgardel.com.ar. 45 bed spaces, including 10 in 2 rooms with private bathroom. From $22 (£15) per bed; $50 (£34) for room. Rates include continental breakfast. No credit cards. Metro: Independencia. **Amenities:** Concierge; self-service drink station; TV room; free high-speed Internet; shared kitchen. *In room:* Lockers.

Lina's Tango GuestHouse ★★★ Finds If you want to immerse yourself in the tango scene, this is the place to stay. Owner Lina Acuña, who hails from Colombia, owns this charming little spot. She herself is a tango dancer and wanted to create a space where the tango community from around the world could come together. As a woman-owned space, it's also great for women traveling alone, and Lina often goes with her guests on informal trips to the *milongas,* offering a unique inside view. Lina lives in the house, and its 1960s exterior hides the fact that the building dates from the turn of the last century. In the rooms off the back garden, the original doors and other elements remain. She has painted these in kitschy colors reminiscent of La Boca, and vines and trees add to the authentic Porteño atmosphere. Guests and Lina's friends gather here for conversation, impromptu help with each other's dance techniques, and *asados* on holidays and weekends. Three of the eight guest rooms share bathrooms. Rooms come in different sizes but all are big enough to share. Breakfast is included, and guests can use the small kitchen and a washing machine. The TV is in the shared living room, and it can be noisy with people talking and dancing in the courtyard.

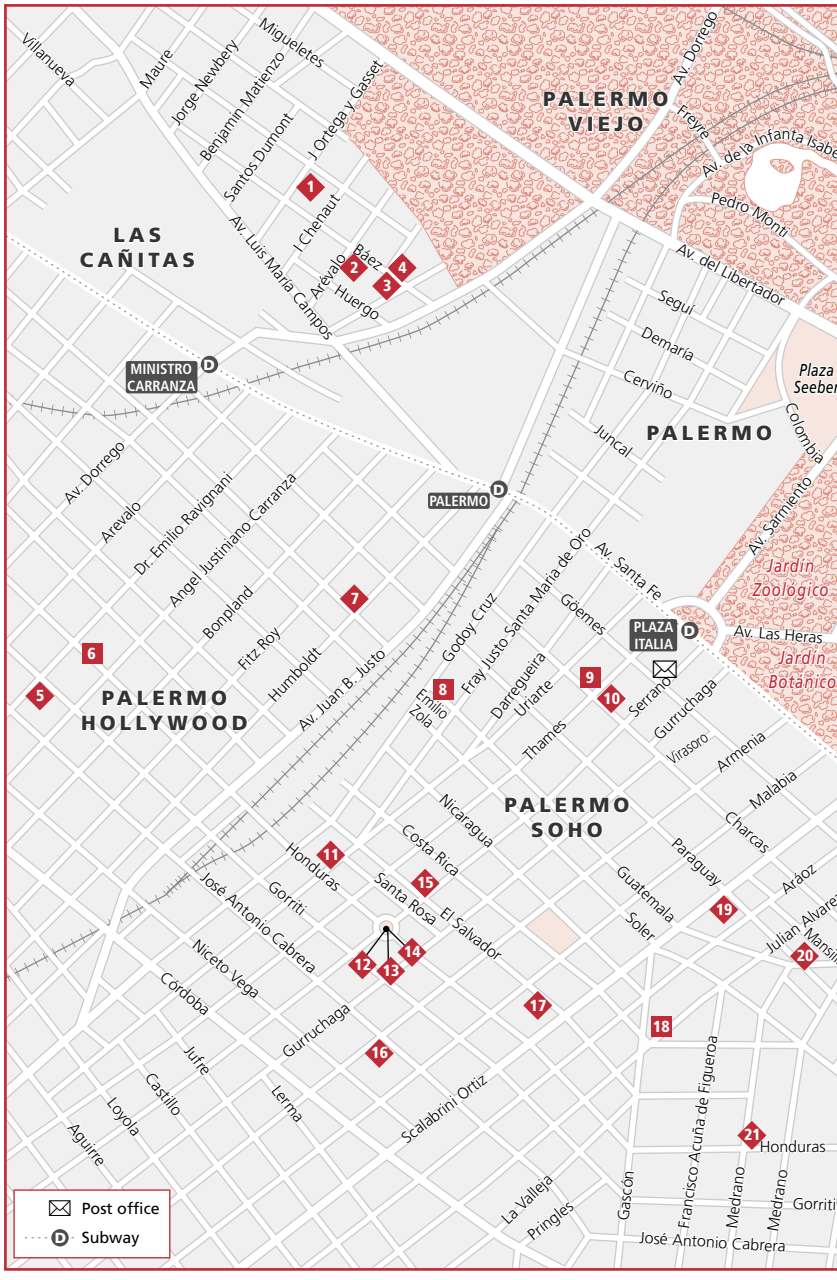
Estados Unidos 780 (at Piedras), 1011 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4361-6817** or 11/4300-7367. www.tangoguesthouse.com.ar. 8 units, 5 with private bathroom. $40–$70 (£27–£47) double. 20% added for 1-night stays. Rates include continental breakfast. No credit cards. Metro: Independencia. **Amenities:** Continental breakfast; self-service laundry; self-service kitchen; tango tours. *In room:* Wi-Fi.

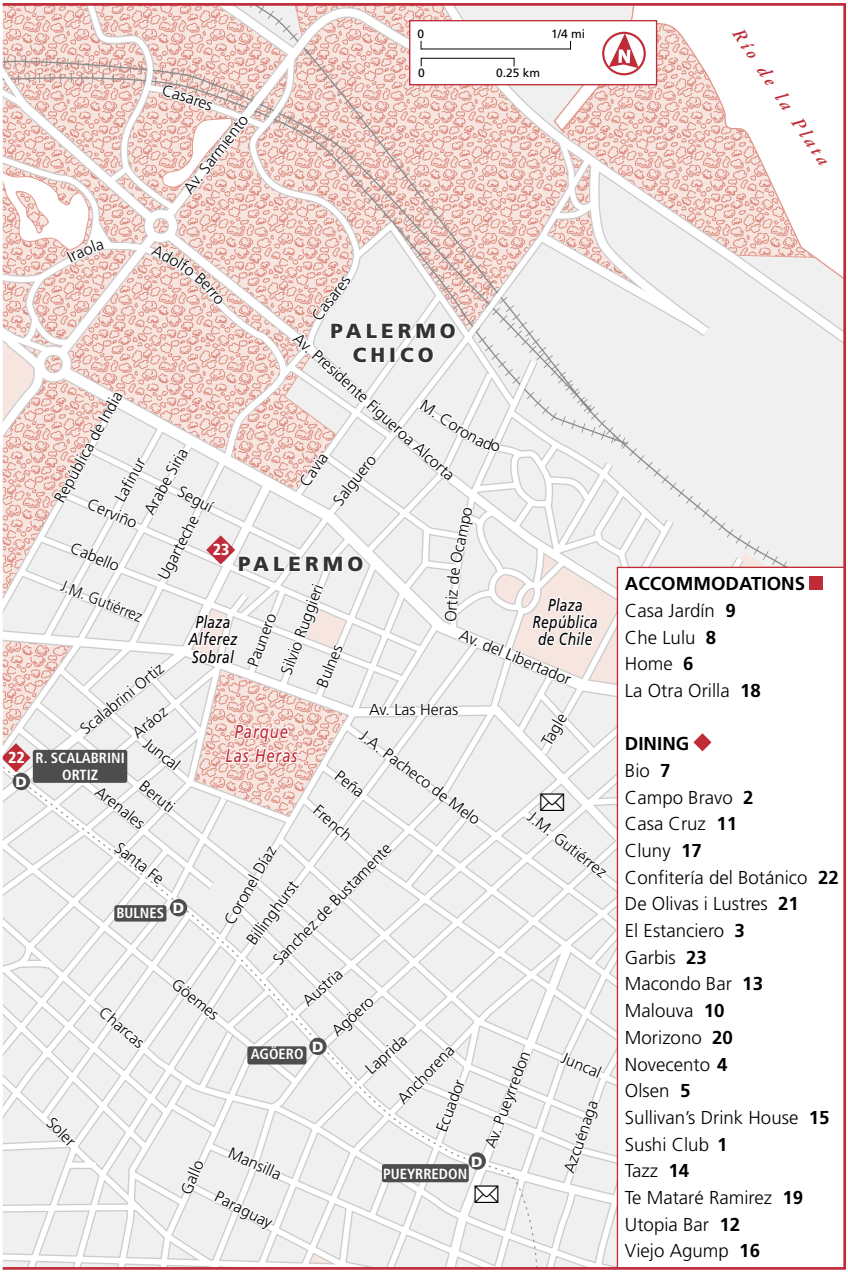
PALERMO

Inexpensive

Casa Jardín ★ Owner Nerina Sturgeon wanted to create an "artist hostel" in the heart of Palermo Viejo, and she has succeeded in doing so. Built into an old house, this intimate hostel boasts high ceilings—all the better to display Nerina's paintings, as well as the artwork of others, throughout the space. The gallery atmosphere is furthered by exhibitions held here periodically, complete with rooftop parties on the garden-wrapped terrace overlooking the street. There are 15 bed spaces—nine beds are in shared spaces, and six are in three private rooms. All rooms share public bathrooms. As a woman-owned-and-run business, it's an ideal location for young women travelers. Take note that while the atmosphere is the same, the hostel has moved across the street from its old location into an equally charming house. No breakfast is served, but a 24-hour cafe sits across the street, and there is a shared kitchen.

Where to Stay & Dine in Palermo





ACCOMMODATIONS

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Tazz **14**
Te Mataré Ramirez **19**
Utopia Bar **12**
Viejo Agump **16**

Charcas 4422 (at Scalabrini Ortiz), 1425 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4774-8783** or 11/15-4028-9063 (cell). Fax 11/4891-9208. www.casajardinba.com.ar. 15 bed spaces, including 3 private rooms. $15 (£10) per bed; $20 (£14) for single room; $33 (£22) for double room; $50 (£34) for triple room. No credit cards. Metro: Plaza Italia. **Amenities:** Concierge; TV room; high-speed Internet; shared kitchen; self-service drink station. *In room:* Wi-Fi; lockers.

CONGRESO

Moderate

The Golden Tulip Savoy Ever since Dutch Crown Prince William married the beautiful Argentine commoner Maxima in 2002, Netherlands natives have been flocking to Argentina in droves. The Dutch-owned Golden Tulip, opened in the faded but historic hotel Savoy, is an attempt by Dutch investors to catch that traffic, and the majority of the hotel's clients are from Europe. The original hotel opened in 1910, with largely Art Nouveau elements. It was just one small part of the glamorous rebuilding of Avenida Callao in the aftermath of the opening of the nearby Congreso. The hotel became part of the Golden Tulip chain in 2000. The company has renovated the hotel completely, maintaining original detail such as gorgeous moldings and stained-glass decoration, though the lobby was already irrevocably altered in the 1960s. The rooms are very large, and each is entered through its own antechamber. Rooms facing the street have tiny French balconies, but half of the hotel faces an interior courtyard with no views. All rooms are soundproof and have Wi-Fi. Suite bathrooms include a whirlpool bathtub. The hotel's Madrigales restaurant offers Argentine cuisine with interesting Latin American fusion elements. There is no pool, sauna, or gym here, but the hotel has an agreement with a nearby establishment.

Av. Callao 181 (at Juan Perón), 1022 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4370-8000.** Fax 11/4370-8020. www.gtsavoyhotel.com.ar. 174 units, including 15 suites. From $145 (£98) double; $242 (£164) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $12 (£8.20). Metro: Congreso. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; access to nearby health club; spa; concierge; small business center; room service; laundry service; conference center. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Inexpensive

Hotel de Los Dos Congresos Value This hotel is housed in a historically listed building just across from Congreso. Some units come in odd shapes and arrangements, so ask to see a room before taking it. A few rooms are split-levels, with the bed in lofts; others have very large bathrooms, others small. Some bathrooms have only showers, while others have tub/shower combinations. Suites come with Jacuzzi tubs. Hair dryers are available at the front desk. Rooms facing Congreso have fantastic views, but it can be noisy, especially given the constant protests in front of Congreso. There is no price differential for rooms with or without views. Staff members are exceptionally helpful. Most patrons hail from Europe and South America as part of tour groups, and the hotel also heavily advertises itself as gay-friendly. The hotel no longer accepts pets.

Rivadavia 1777 (at Callao), 1033 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4372-0466** or 11/4371-0072. Fax 11/4372-0317. www.hoteldoscongresos.com. 50 units, including 2 suites. $79–$90 (£54–£61) double; from $100 (£68) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Optional parking. Metro: Congreso. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; concierge; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, minibar, coffeemaker, small safe.

Hotel Ibis ★★ Kids Value Well located on Plaza Congreso, all rooms here have street views, and many face the plaza directly. Rooms are a good size for this price range, and all are identical, with a peach-and-mint color pattern. They are all doubles, but an

extra bed is available for a few dollars more. Some rooms also connect, which is an ideal option for a family or group of friends. High-speed Internet is also available in the small business center, along with Wi-Fi access, for about $1.50 (£1) an hour. Bathrooms are bright and clean, all with shower stalls only (no tubs). The basic Argentine restaurant is a good value at about $10 (£6.80) for a prix-fixe dinner, and $1 to $3 (70p–£2) for most lunch items a la carte. Breakfast is not included in the rates but is about $5 (£3.40) per person. The hotel, naturally, is popular with French tourists, and most of the staff speaks Spanish, English, and French. You'll find lots of college-aged backpackers here.

Hipólito Yrigoyen 1592 (at Ceballos), 1089 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/5300-5555.** Fax 11/5300-5566. www.ibishotel.com. 147 units. From $62 (£42) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $10 (£6.80) in a nearby garage. Metro: Congreso. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; concierge; business center; laundry service; high-speed Internet; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi.

TRIBUNALES

Expensive

Dazzler Hotel Libertad ★ This hotel, built in 1978, is virtually unknown to the North American market. The majority of clients come from South America, though all staff members speak English. The hotel is conveniently situated overlooking Plaza Libertad, set against Avenida 9 de Julio, a few blocks from Teatro Colón (p. 131). Front rooms have excellent views, but they can be noisy. All rooms are on the small side, but they're exceptionally bright, with floor-to-ceiling windows that make the rooms feel larger. Corner rooms offer the most space. Ask about connecting rooms if you're traveling in a group or with family. Large closets and a combination desk and vanity space round out the rooms. The small smoke-glass-mirrored lobby has a staircase leading to the large and bright restaurant, where breakfast is served.

Libertad 902 (at Paraguay), 1012 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/4816-5005.** www.dazzlerhotel.com. 88 units. From $115 (£78) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. Parking garage across from hotel. Metro: Tribunales. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small health club; sauna; concierge; small business center; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning, Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, Internet, minibar, hair dryer.

Inexpensive

Auge Buenos Aires ★ Alejandro Guiggi opened this private-room pension in 2004 in a renovated apartment building near the Supreme Court. His idea was to create *conventillo*-style lodgings (Italian immigrant rooming house), to foster better understanding of turn-of-the-20th-century Buenos Aires. He expanded the size of his small hotel in 2006. Faithfully restored details include wooden sashes on the windows, ceiling moldings, and stained-glass details throughout the rooms and public areas. The color pattern and antique furniture he has chosen call to mind a bordello, adding a bit of kitsch to the complex. Many of the rooms also have balconies and French doors. Rooms are available for the day, week, or month. Prices vary, dropping significantly the longer you rent. Bathrooms for 10 of the rooms are shared, with whimsical sinks made from buckets and stools. Six rooms have private bathrooms, and these are quieter than the main areas of the pension. Breakfast is included, and guests have 24-hour access and full use of the communal kitchen. Air-conditioning is in rooms with private bathrooms only. Wi-Fi access is free, but signal strength varies. Alejandro has a smaller, similar property in the La Boca neighborhood.

Paraná 473, Floor 3 (at La valle), Buenos Aires 1017. ✆ **11/4373-6812** or 11/4361-4535. augebuenosaires@yahoo.com.ar. 16 units, 6 with private bathroom. From $35 (£24) with shared bathroom; from $50 (£34) with private bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. No credit cards. Metro: Tribunales. **Amenities:** A/C (in some rooms); laundry service; kitchen; Wi-Fi.

ABASTO

Expensive

Abasto Plaza Hotel ★ A block away from this hotel are both the Abasto Shopping Center and Esquina Carlos Gardel, sites dedicated to the tango crooner. The hotel takes this to heart, with a unique tango shop for shoes, dresses, and other *milonga* accessories. Free tango lessons and shows take place Thursday evenings at 9pm in the lobby. There's also a free tango show every night at 8pm down in the restaurant. The rooms are a good size, with rich dark woods and deep-red carpets, though so-called thematic suites take their special decor from tango. Superior rooms come with whirlpool bathtubs. The restaurant, **Volver,** named for a Gardel song, is decorated in a funky design, complete with silver hands holding up shelves of liquor behind the bar. The small heated outdoor pool sits on the rooftop, with access through a small gym. While this hotel does not offer much of interest in itself to Jewish travelers, it is the closest full-service hotel to Once and Abasto's historic Jewish sites.

Av. Corrientes 3190 (at Anchorena), 1193 Buenos Aires. ✆ **11/6311-4465.** Fax 11/6311-4465. www.abastoplaza.com. 126 units. From $157 (£106) double; from $266 (£180) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $12 (£8.20). Metro: Carlos Gardel. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; heated outdoor pool; small health club; concierge; business center; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, Wi-Fi, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

3 WHERE TO DINE

Buenos Aires offers world-class dining with a variety of Argentine and international restaurants and cuisines. Nothing matches the meat from Pampas grass-fed Argentine cows, the focus of the dining experience throughout the city, from the humblest *parrilla* (grill) to the finest business-class restaurant. Empanadas, dough pockets filled with ground beef and other ingredients, are another staple, sold almost everywhere.

Buenos Aires's most fashionable neighborhoods for dining are all in Palermo. Las Cañitas provides a row of Argentine and Nouvelle-fusion cuisine concentrated on Calle Báez. Palermo Hollywood has matched this with even more trendy hot spots combining fine dining with a bohemian atmosphere in small, renovated, turn-of-the-20th-century houses. These restaurants are attracting some of the city's top chefs, many of whom trained in France and Spain. Some of the most exquisite and interesting cuisine is in Palermo Viejo. Both Palermo Viejo and Las Cañitas are near the D metro line, but the best restaurants are often a long walk from the stations, which close at 11pm. All things considered, cabs are the best way to reach these restaurants.

Puerto Madero's docks are lined with more top restaurants, along with a mix of chains and hit-or-miss spots. The MicroCentro and Recoleta offer many outstanding restaurants and cafes, some of which have been on the map for decades. Buenos Aires's cafe life, where friends meet over coffee, is as sacred a ritual to Porteños as it is to Parisians. Favorite local meeting spots include La Biela, in Recoleta, across from the world-famous Recoleta Cemetery, and Café Tortoni, one of the city's most beautiful and traditional cafes, on Avenida de Mayo close to Plaza de Mayo. These places were once evocatively smoke-filled, but an anti-smoking law was enacted in 2006. If this is your first time in a Buenos Aires cafe, you may not notice. If you have been here before, you may agree with me that something unique has been lost to Porteño cafes—once smoky, but now sterile as hospitals.

Porteños eat breakfast until 10am, lunch between noon and 4pm, and dinner late—usually after 9pm, though some restaurants open as early as 7pm. If you are an early-bird diner in the North American and British style, wanting to eat from 5pm on, look for restaurants in our listings that remain open between lunch and dinner. If you can make a reservation, I highly recommend doing so. If you do not want to commit, get to places close to their usual 8pm opening time, when you will almost always arrive to a nearly empty restaurant. However, once the clock hits 9pm, virtually every table at the best restaurants will suddenly be full.

Many restaurants serve executive lunch menus (usually fixed-price, three-course meals) at noon, but most dinner menus are a la carte. There is sometimes a small "cover" charge for bread and other items placed at the table. In restaurants that serve pasta, the pasta and sauce are sometimes priced separately. Standard tipping is 10% in Buenos Aires, more for exceptional service. When paying by credit card, you will often be expected to leave the *propina* (tip) in cash, since many credit card receipts don't provide a place to include the tip. Be aware that some new restaurants are not yet accepting credit cards, due to fears still resonating from the peso collapse. Some restaurants might also have signs indicating they accept credit cards, only to mysteriously have broken machines when you ask to pay this way. Many restaurants close between lunch and dinner, and some close completely on Sunday or Monday, or only offer dinner. In January and February, many restaurants offer very limited hours or close for vacations, because most Porteños flee to the beach this time of year. It's best to call ahead during these months, to make sure a restaurant is open so as to avoid disappointment.

Though Buenos Aires is a very cosmopolitan city, it is not very ethnically diverse, at least on the surface. However, a few areas reflect the influences of Middle Eastern and Jewish immigrants who came to this city in the wake of World War I and the Ottoman Empire's collapse. Middle Eastern restaurants are clustered in Palermo Viejo near the *subte* station Scalabrini Ortiz, and also on Calle Armenia. I list several of them below. Because Once and Abasto were the traditional neighborhoods for Jewish immigrants, you'll find many kosher restaurants (some traditional, others recently opened by young people trying to bring back the cuisine they remember their grandparents cooking) along Calle Tucumán in particular. Because many Buenos Aires Jews are Sephardic or of Middle Eastern descent, you'll also find Arabic influences here along with Ashkenazi, or eastern European Jewish, touches.

With as many local Italian last names as Spanish ones, it's hard to distinguish those of Italian descent as a specific ethnic group within Argentina, as you can in the United States, Canada, or Australia. As such, Buenos Aires's Italian food is Argentine food in essence, and pastas and other Italian dishes are usually folded in with traditional Argentine offerings such as grilled beef. La Boca is Buenos Aires's historic Little Italy, the place where Italian immigrants first settled at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The atmosphere in these restaurants plays on this past and caters to tourists, but this is not where the city's best Italian food is served. Instead, it is usually found in old, simple *parrillas* that have operated for decades and include pastas on their menus. Throughout this chapter, most of these are in the Inexpensive categories all over the city. Additionally, though it is on the pricey side, check out Piegari in Recoleta's La Recova restaurant area, which has some of the best northern Italian cuisine in the city.

Asians only make up a tiny portion of Buenos Aires's population, with little effect on local cuisine. Still, in keeping with international trends, sushi bars and other restaurants with Japanese and Chinese influences have cropped up. All over the city, you will find

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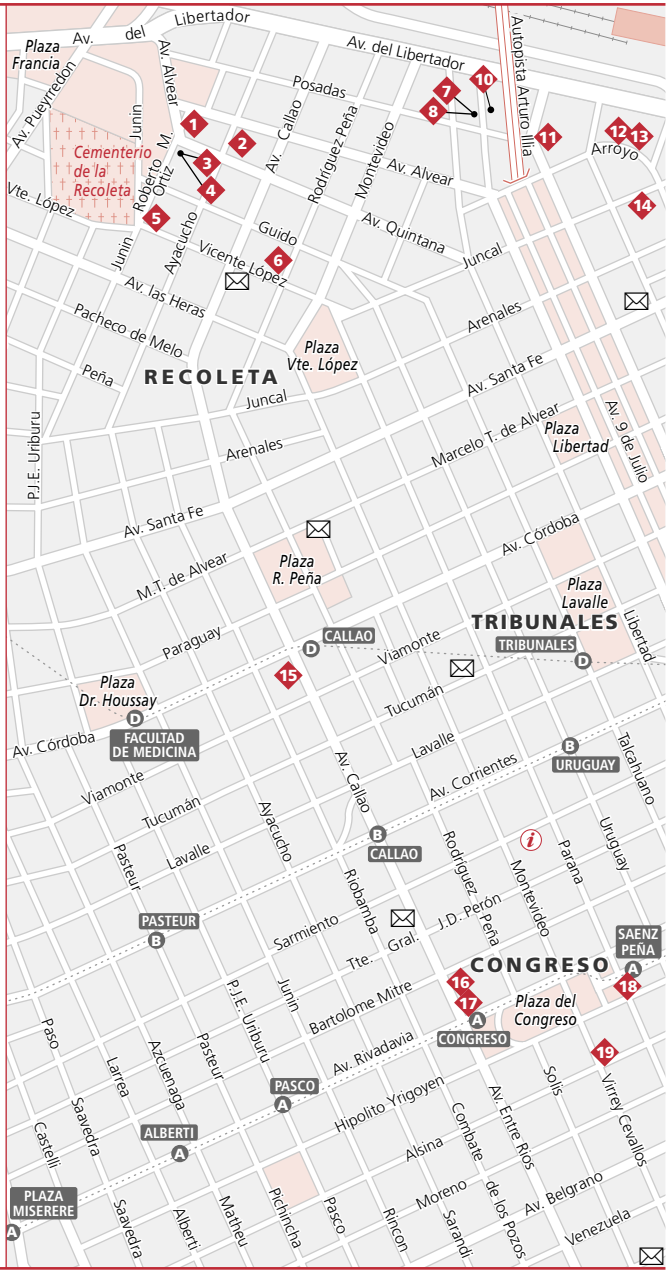

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Information
Post office
Subway
Subway transfer
Retiro Station
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LAVALLE
FLORIDA
L.N. ALEM
CARLOS PELLEGRINI
DIAGONAL NORTE
Obelisco
9 DE JULIO
CATEDRAL
PLAZA DE MAYO
BOLÍVAR
PERÚ
PIEDRAS
AV. DE MAYO
LIMA
BELGRANO
MORENO
INDEPENDENCIA
MICROCENTRO
CORRIENTES THEATER DISTRICT
PUERTO MADERO
MONSERRAT
SAN TELMO
THE ECOLOGICAL RESERVE
Darsena Norte
Dique No. 4
Dique No. 3
Dique No. 2
Parque Mujeres Argentina
Plaza San Martín
Plaza de Mayo
Plaza Dorrego
Av. del Libertador
Av. Antártida Argentina
Av. E. Madero
Av. Ramos Mejía
San Martín
Maipú
Florida
Av. Córdoba
Viamonte
Tucumán
Lavalle
Av. Corrientes
Sarmiento
Av. Leandro N. Alem
Av. Rosales
Av. de la Rábida
Av. Alicia Moreau de Justo
Av. de los Italianos
T. Guevara
Av. Macacha Güemes
Mitre
Av. de Mayo
Rivadavia
Bartolomé Mitre
Av. Roque Sáenz Peña
(Diagonal Norte)
Tte. Gral. J.D. Perón
Reconquista
25 de Mayo
Balcarce
Defensa
Moreno
Bolívar
Perú
Alsina
Hipólito Yrigoyen
Av. Julio A. Roca
(Diagonal Sur)
Av. Belgrano
Venezuela
Chacabuco
Piedras
Tacuarí
Bernardo de Irigoyen
Av. 9 de Julio
Lima
Salta
Santiago del Estero
San José
Pte. Luis Sáenz Peña
Chile
Mexico
Peru
Av. Independencia
Estados Unidos
Carlos Calvo
Humberto Primo
Av. Paseo Colón
Av. Ing. Huergo
Azopardo
Av. San Juan
Autopista 25 de Mayo
Bvd. A. Villaflor
Cerrito
Libertad
C. Pellegrini
Suipacha
C. Pellegrini
Esmeralda
M.T. de Alvear
Paraguay
Av.
Av. Ramos Mejía
Florida
Maipú
Av. Córdoba
Viamonte
Tucumán
San Martín
Florida
Lavalle
Av. Corrientes
Sarmiento
Av. Leandro N. Alem
Av. Rosales
Av. de la Rábida
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T. Guevara
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(Diagonal Sur)
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Azopardo
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Autopista 25 de Mayo
Bvd. A. Villaflor
Cerrito
Libertad
C. Pellegrini
Suipacha
C. Pellegrini
Esmeralda
M.T. de Alvear
Paraguay
Av.

Tips Wine Tasting

Part of what makes a meal in Buenos Aires so good is the fine wine selection, specially chosen to complement beef, chicken, fish, and other items on the menu. Most Argentine wine comes from the Mendoza district, bordering the Andean mountains. Malbecs make up most of the best, with cabernets, champagnes, and even grappas on the menus in the humblest restaurants. If you know nothing about wine, you may want to take a wine-tasting class, to make sense of the selections and suggestions offered by the waiter or sommelier. One of the city's best is run by the **Hotel Alvear's Cave de Vines,** which will run you about $50 (£34) per person. You'll get about an hour with a sommelier who will explain the grape-growing process, the harvest, and how the wine is actually produced as you sample different wines and taste them with various appetizers from various regions of Argentina. Like fine diamonds, wine is judged by color and clarity, and you'll learn what to look for in every glass, as well as how to pair wines with food. Other points include discerning taste and scent points as well as how to hold a glass of wine without damaging its contents with your hand's own body heat.

various sushi fast-food-chain restaurants as well. I also describe a few restaurants in Buenos Aires's very tiny and little-known Chinatown district, located in the Belgrano neighborhood.

If you are looking through these listings and still cannot decide what you want to eat, head to one of these three neighborhoods, and you are bound to find something that pleases you: **Puerto Madero**'s historical dock buildings are one such place, and many of the restaurants here are a bargain; **Calle Báez,** in the Las Cañitas area of Palermo, is another such area, and is also one of the most happening restaurant scenes in the whole city. **Plaza Serrano,** in Palermo Hollywood, has many a good choice for the young, funky, and bargain-minded, as well as **Calle Chile** in San Telmo. All of these areas also have plenty of places nearby for after-dinner drinks and dancing.

For additional opinions, check out **www.restaurant.com.ar**. It provides information in English and Spanish on restaurants in Buenos Aires and other major cities, and allows you to search by neighborhood as well as cuisine type. Another very helpful restaurant resource online is **www.guiaoleo.com.ar**. You can search by cuisine style and price point, though all listings are in Spanish only. Once in Buenos Aires, look for the **De Dios** map company's excellent restaurant map in bookstores everywhere, or order it ahead of time at www.guiaoleo.com.ar or www.amazon.com.

Prices at some restaurants have doubled and even tripled since our last edition, in particular at Palermo Viejo restaurants, which now match or exceed prices in Europe and North America. Still, the restaurants listed in the Inexpensive and Moderate categories remain reasonable. Inexpensive restaurants serve main courses from less than $3 (£2) to about $8 (£5.40). Moderate restaurants serve entrees from around $5 (£3.40) to about $15 (£10). Expensive restaurants' main courses cost about $12 to $25 (£8.20–£17). Very Expensive dishes run from $25 (£17) up to almost $50 (£34) and higher.

Note: While English is becoming comfortably prevalent in Buenos Aires, less expensive restaurants tend to have fewer English speakers on staff.

PLAZA DE MAYO AREA

Moderate

Gran Victoria ★ CAFE/ARGENTINE Watch the political world of Argentina pass by your window at this great cafe overlooking Plaza de Mayo. This cafe sits in the middle of one of the country's most important historic areas, with stunning views of the Cabildo, Plaza de Mayo, Casa Rosada, and the Metropolitan Cathedral, in addition to the excellent people-watching opportunities. Food is basic Argentine, with Italian touches, and a great dessert selection. I'd recommend coming here for a break after sightseeing in the area. What's more, the waitresses have a pleasant sense of humor (I guess they'd have to, dealing with so many politicians).

Hipólito Yrigoyen 500 (at Diagonal Sur). ✆ **11/4345-7703.** Main courses $5–$12 (£3.40–£8.20). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7am–9pm. Metro: Bolívar.

MICROCENTRO

Expensive

Dora ★★ SPANISH/SEAFOOD Dora has been open since the 1940s, run by the same family (the third generation is now in charge), but it has moved recently from its former location. It's still loud, noisy, crazy, and chaotic—an odd mix of businesspersons from nearby offices and casually dressed older locals who have been regulars for decades. The specialty is fish, with a few beef, chicken, and pasta dishes thrown in almost as an afterthought. The Cazuela Dora is the specialty—a casserole of fish, shellfish, and shrimp thrown into one pot. It's expensive for Buenos Aires; appetizers alone run from $4 to $14 (£2.70–£9.45), though some of the starters are made with caviar. The dessert menu includes a surprisingly varied choice of light fruits in season. Because they serve so much fish, Dora has one of the city's largest white-wine selections. U.S. dollars are accepted.

Reconquista 1076 (at Paraguay). ✆ **11/4311-2891.** Main courses $12–$25 (£8.20–£17). V. Mon–Thurs noon–1am; Fri–Sat noon–2am. Metro: San Martín.

Le Sud ★★ FRENCH/MEDITERRANEAN Executive Chef Thierry Pszonka earned a gold medal from the National Committee of French Gastronomy and gained experience at La Bourgogne before opening this gourmet restaurant in the new Sofitel Hotel. His simple, elegant cooking style embraces spices and olive oils from Provence, to create delicious entrees such as stewed rabbit with green pepper and tomatoes, polenta with Parmesan and rosemary, and spinach with lemon ravioli. Le Sud's dining room is as sophisticated as the cuisine: The design is contemporary, with chandeliers and black-marble floors, tables of Brazilian rosewood, and large windows overlooking Calle Arroyo. After dinner, consider a drink in the adjacent wine bar.

Arroyo 841–849 (at Suipacha in the Sofitel Hotel). ✆ **11/4131-0000.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $15–$25 (£10–£17). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6:30–11am, 12:30–3pm, and 7:30pm–midnight. Metro: San Martín.

Plaza Grill ★★ INTERNATIONAL For nearly a century, the Plaza Grill dominated the city's power-lunch scene, and it remains the first choice for government officials and business executives. The dining room is decorated with dark oak furniture, the owners' 90-year-old Dutch porcelain collection, Indian fans from the British Empire, and Villeroy & Boch china place settings. Tables are well spaced, allowing for intimate conversations. Order a la carte from the international menu or off the *parrilla*—the steaks are perfect Argentine cuts. Marinated filet mignon, thinly sliced and served with gratinéed potatoes, is superb. Another interesting choice is venison with crispy applesauce, served

during the November and December holiday season, though seemingly incongruous in the heat of Buenos Aires's summer. The "poparisky eggs" form another classic dish—two poached eggs in a bread shell topped with a rich mushroom-and-bacon sauce. The restaurant's wine list spans seven countries, with the world's best Malbec coming from Mendoza.

Marriott Plaza Hotel, Calle Florida 1005 (at Santa Fe overlooking Plaza San Martín). ✆ **11/4318-3070.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$25 (£8.20–£17). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 7pm–midnight. Metro: San Martín.

Moderate

Broccolino ★ ITALIAN The name of this restaurant doesn't mean little broccoli; it's a corruption of Italian immigrant slang for New York's biggest and once most heavily Italian borough (notice the Brooklyn memorabilia filling the walls and the mural of Manhattan's skyline). This casual trattoria near Calle Florida is popular with North Americans. Many of the waiters speak English, and the restaurant has a distinctly New York feel. Three small dining rooms are decorated in quintessential red-and-white-checkered tablecloths, and the smell of tomatoes, onions, and garlic fills the air. The restaurant is known for its spicy pizzas, fresh pastas, and, above all, its sauces (*salsas* in Spanish). The restaurant also serves 907 kilograms (2,000 lb.) per month of baby calamari sautéed in wine, onions, parsley, and garlic.

Córdoba 820 (at Esmeralda). ✆ **11/4322-9848.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $5–$15 (£3.40–£10). No credit cards. Daily noon–4pm and 7pm–1am. Metro: Lavalle.

Café de la Ciudad CAFE/ARGENTINE The city's only restaurant with outdoor dining directly overlooking the Obelisco, Café de la Ciudad opened 40 years ago on one of the six corners around the landmark, on Avenida 9 de Julio. It's like Buenos Aires's Times Square, where you can watch the myriad flashing electronic ads for Japanese and American companies. Sure, it's noisy, and, sure, you're a target for beggars, but you'll be dining under the symbol of the city. The food comes in large portions; sandwiches, pizzas, and specially priced executive menus are made fast, so it's a great stop if you're short on time. The subway station Carlos Pellegrini is right here too. On nights after the Boca Juniors have won a game, it's a great free show, when locals gather to cheer under the Obelisco, as cars and taxis hurtle by, beeping at the crowd. The cafe is also a 24-hour place, so you can stop by after clubbing or a show at one of the nearby theaters, and watch the parade of Porteños passing by.

Corrientes 999 (at Carlos Pellegrini, Av. 9 de Julio). ✆ **11/4322-8905** or 11/4322-6174. Main courses $3–$12 (£2–£8.20). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 24 hr. Metro: Carlos Pellegrini.

Empire ★ ASIAN/THAI This restaurant is interesting, but it's in a surprisingly desolate part of the MicroCentro—steps away from the action, on a very small street that gets little foot traffic but was recently pedestrianized. Enter this dark space, with paintings of elephants and mosaic decorations made from broken mirrors on the columns, and you'll feel as though you've stepped into some kind of funky club. For vegetarians seeking a break from the meat offerings everywhere else, it's is an ideal stop, with its many all-vegetable or noodle offerings. Many come for drinks alone and sit at the large bar with shelves of backlit bottles casting a warm glow. Empire's advertising symbol is the Empire State Building, but there's nothing New York–like about it. It's also one of the city's most popular restaurants among gay locals.

Tres Sargentos 427 (at San Martín). ✆ **11/5411-4312** or 11/5411-5706. empire_bar@hotmail.com. Main courses $6–$10 (£4.05–£6.80). AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–1am; Sat 7:30pm–3am. Metro: San Martín.

Ligure ★★ (Finds) FRENCH/ITALIAN Painted mirrors look over the long rectangular dining room, which, since 1933, has drawn ambassadors, artists, and business leaders by day and a more romantic crowd at night. A nautical theme prevails, with fishnets, dock ropes, and masts decorating the room; captain's wheels substitute for chandeliers. Portions are huge and meticulously prepared—an unusual combination for French-inspired cuisine. Seafood options include the Patagonian tooth fish sautéed with butter, prawns, and mushrooms, or the trout glazed with an almond sauce. The chateaubriand is outstanding, and the *bife de lomo* (filet mignon) can be prepared seven different ways (pepper sauce with brandy is delightful, made at your table).

Juncal 855 (at Esmeralda). ✆ **11/4393-0644** or 11/4394-8226. Reservations recommended. Main courses $6–$10 (£4.05–£6.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 8pm–midnight. Metro: San Martín.

Los Chilenos ★ SEAFOOD/CHILEAN A taste of the long country next door is what you'll find here, and because of that, this restaurant is popular with Chileans who live here or are visiting. It's a simple place, with a home-style feeling. The dining room has long tables where everyone sits together, and it's decorated with posters of Chilean tourist sites and draped with Chilean flags. Fish is one of the restaurant's fortes, and one of the most popular dishes is abalone in mayonnaise.

Suipacha 1024 (at Santa Fe). ✆ **11/4328-3123.** Main courses $3–$10 (£2–£6.80). V. Mon–Sat noon–4pm and 8pm–1am. Metro: San Martín.

Richmond Cafe ★★ CAFE/ARGENTINE Enter this place and find the pace and atmosphere of an older Buenos Aires. The Richmond Cafe, a *café notable,* is all that is left of the Richmond Hotel, an Argentine-British hybrid that opened in 1917 and once catered to the elite. The cafe sits in the lobby of the former hotel, whose upstairs area has been converted into offices. The menu here is traditionally Argentine, and there is a confitería section in the front, serving as a cafe and fast-food eatery. You'll find locals of all kinds here, from workers grabbing a quick bite to well-dressed seniors who must recall Calle Florida's more elegant heyday. The decor is that of a gentlemen's club, full of wood, brass, and red-leather upholstery. Patrons can still let loose downstairs, in a bar area full of billiard tables. The menu of high-quality pastries is extensive. The restaurant offers hearty basics such as chicken, fish, and beef. A la carte, the food tends to be expensive, but three-course executive menus with a drink included are a good bargain, running about $20 (£14), depending on what you choose.

Calle Florida 468 (at Corrientes). ✆ **11/4322-1341** or 11/4322-1653. http://restaurant.com.ar/richmond. Main courses $6–$10 (£4.05–£6.80). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7am–10pm. Metro: Florida.

Inexpensive

Café Literario CAFE/ARGENTINE This quiet little cafe takes advantage of its location next door to the place where Argentine literary great Jorge Luis Borges was born. It sort of has a loose affiliation with the Fundación Internacional Jorge Luis Borges, which works to preserve the writer's memory and work. Literature-themed, the cafe hosts readings and art events on an irregular basis. A range of publications lies on shelves and racks for patrons to peruse while they eat. The idea, according to the owners, was to have a place where people could come to read and eat and be more relaxed than in a library. Fare includes light items such as sandwiches, snacks, desserts, and Argentine steak. The building is modern but opens into the patio of the adjacent YWCA (Tucumán 844; ✆ **11/4322-1550**), inside a gorgeous early-20th-century building built over the now demolished house where Borges was born. Café Literario serves as the cafeteria for the YWCA.

Stop in for information on plays, art shows, other events aimed at the general public, and exercise programs strictly for women.

Tucumán 840 (at Suipacha). ✆ **11/4328-0391.** Main courses $2–$5 (£1.35–£3.40). No credit cards. Mon–Fri 8am–6pm. Metro: Lavalle.

Café Retiro ★★ Finds CAFE/ARGENTINE This cafe is part of a chain, the Café Café consortium. As such, there is nothing spectacular about the food, but it is high quality, consistent, and inexpensive. The main point of dining here is to enjoy the restored elegance of the original cafe, which was part of Retiro Station when it was built in 1915. The place had been closed for many years but was restored in 2001 with the help of a government program. It is now one of the *cafés notables,* the interiors of which are considered historically important to the nation. The marble has been cleaned, the bronze chandeliers polished, and the stained-glass windows have been restored, allowing a luminescent light to flow in. This cafe is ideal if you are taking a train from here to other parts of Argentina and the province, such as Tigre, or if you came to admire the architecture of Retiro and the other classical stations in this enormous transportation complex. It's also worth checking out if you came to see the nearby English Clock Tower, which sits in the plaza just outside. The staff is friendly and full of advice on things to do in town. An attached art gallery in the hallway outside also has changing exhibitions. A tango show takes place on Fridays at 7pm.

Ramos Mejia 1358 (at Libertador, in the Retiro Station Lobby). ✆ **11/4516-0902.** Main courses $2–$6 (£1.35–£4.05). No credit cards. Daily 6:30am–10pm. Metro: Retiro.

Café Tortoni ★★★ Moments CAFE You cannot come to Buenos Aires without visiting this Porteño institution. The artistic and intellectual hangout of Buenos Aires since 1858, this historic cafe has served guests such as Jorge Luis Borges, Julio de Caro, Cátulo Castillo, and José Gobello. Its current location opened in the 1890s, when Avenida de Mayo was created as the main thoroughfare of a rich and powerful emerging Buenos Aires. Wonderfully appointed in woods, stained glass, yellowing marble, and bronzes, the place itself exudes more history than any of the photos and artifacts hanging on its walls. It's the perfect place for a coffee or a small snack after wandering along Avenida de Mayo. Twice-nightly tango shows in a cramped side gallery, where the performers often walk through the crowd, are worth attending, though tight seating means you'll get to know the patron next to you almost too well. Up until recently, tourists and locals existed side by side quite comfortably, but the recent explosion in tourism has taken out some of the authenticity of the venue, with tour buses pulling up and filling the venue with gawkers. Try to visit in the morning, or very late at night. However, do not expect great service: Sometimes, the only way to get attention is to jump up and down, even if your server is a few feet from you. And management seems to be limiting who can gain entry now: If a show is taking place in the gallery, they may turn away touristy-looking groups who just want a snack in the cafe or ask for a quick peak inside at the architecture. All told, it's a beautiful place, but service and treating people well have never been the Tortoni's forte.

Av. de Mayo 825 (at Esmeralda). ✆ **11/4342-4328.** Main courses $2–$10 (£1.35–£6.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 8am–2am; Fri–Sat 8am–3am; Sun 8am–1am. Metro: Av. de Mayo.

Filo ★ Finds ITALIAN/PIZZA Popular with young professionals, artists, and anyone looking for cause to celebrate, Filo presents its happy clients with pizzas, more kinds of pasta than you can imagine, salads with an Italian touch, and potent cocktails. The colorfully decorated and crowded bar hosts occasional live music, and tango lessons take place downstairs a few evenings per week.

Tips Bares y Cafés Notables

If you want to dine in an atmosphere recalling the glory days of Buenos Aires's past, investigate the list of nearly 40 *bares y cafés notables*—historic restaurants, cafes, and bars specially protected by a law stating that their interiors cannot be altered. Known as Law No. 35, this special protection, granted by the city of Buenos Aires, passed in 1998 and was updated in 2002. Many of these special establishments appear in this chapter, including **Café Tortoni, La Biela,** and **La Perla.** They tend to be clustered in the city's oldest neighborhoods, such as Monserrat, Congreso, La Boca, and San Telmo. Ask the tourism office for the map *Bares y Cafés Notables de Buenos Aires,* which lists them all, with photographs of the interiors. Many of the venues also sell a coffee-table book with additional photographs.

San Martín 975 (at Alvear). ✆ **11/4311-0312.** www.filo-ristorante.com. Main courses $4–$10 (£2.20–£5.50). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 8pm–2am. Metro: San Martín.

Galauno Value PARRILLA/ARGENTINE This very basic, small *parrilla* is the reincarnation of La Sortija, recommended over the years in this book. The venue, essentially the same, but with a renovation that removed the charming wood interior, serves exactly the same menu and has the same staff. The emphasis remains on quality food and courteous service at a reasonable price. Most of the patrons are working-class locals who have jobs in the area. It's very busy after 5pm, when they stop in for a bite before making their way home. Galauno prides itself on what it calls *cocina casera,* or home cooking, and serves well-prepared cuts of meat such as *bife de chorizo.* They also have sandwiches for takeout. This place offers good value, and pizza, pasta, and chicken round out the menu.

Lavalle 663 (at Maipú). ✆ **11/4328-0824.** Main courses $3–$10 (£2–£6.80). No credit cards. Daily noon–midnight. Metro: Lavalle.

Il Gran Caffe ★ CAFE/ITALIAN As its name implies, this largely Italian restaurant sells an extensive selection of pastries, pastas, and panini, as well as more traditional Argentine fare. On a busy corner across the street from Galerías Pacífico, it is also one of the best perches from which to watch the crowds passing by on Calle Florida. A covered canopy on the Córdoba side also provides further outdoor seating, rain or shine. In fact, the people-watching is so good that the restaurant charges about 10% more for outdoor dining. If that bothers the budget-conscious spy in you, the best compromise is to sit inside on their upper-floor level, with its bird's-eye view of the street and the Naval Academy, one of the city's most beautiful landmarks. Mixed drinks start at about $5 (£3.40) each. They have an excellent Italian pastry menu; the Neapolitan *sfogliatella* is especially good.

Calle Florida 700 (at Córdoba). ✆ **11/4326-5008.** Main courses $8–$15 (£5.40–£10). AE, MC, V. Daily 7am–2am. Metro: Florida.

Morizono ★ Value JAPANESE A casual Japanese restaurant and sushi bar, Morizono offers such menu items as dumplings stuffed with pork, shrimp and vegetable tempuras, salmon with ginger sauce, and a variety of sushi and sashimi combination platters.

Reconquista 899 (at Paraguay). ✆ **11/4314-0924.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $5–$15 (£3.40–£10). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 12:30–3:30pm and 8pm–1am; Sat 8pm–1am. Metro: San Martín.

MONSERRAT

Moderate

Club Español ★★ SPANISH This restaurant has one of the most magnificent dining rooms in Buenos Aires. It's located in the Club Español, one of the grandest buildings along 9 de Julio. An orgy of brass, marble, agate lighting fixtures, carved oak bas-reliefs, and molded plaster ornaments surround you. Interspersed are Spanish paintings of major battles and graceful Art Nouveau maidens who stare down from the tops of pilasters. Despite the restaurant's architectural grandeur, the atmosphere is surprisingly relaxed and often celebratory; don't be surprised to find a table of champagne-clinking Argentines next to you. Tables have beautiful silver place settings, and tuxedo-clad waiters offer friendly but formal service. Although the menu is a tempting sample of Spanish cuisine—including paella and Spanish omelets—the fish dishes are best. Special salads are meals in themselves; a few include calamari. The wine list is pages long, with a large selection of whites to complement the fish offerings. Bills include a table service of about $1.50 (£1).

Bernardo de Yrigoyen 180 (at Alsina). ✆ **11/4334-4876.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $5–$12 (£3.40–£8.20). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 8pm–midnight (sometimes until 1am Fri–Sat). Metro: Lima.

Restaurante y Bar Mediterráneo ★★ MEDITERRANEAN The InterContinental hotel's exclusive Mediterranean restaurant and bar were built in colonial style, resembling the city's famous Café Tortoni. The downstairs bar, with its hardwood floor, marble-top tables, and polished Victrola playing tango, takes you back to Buenos Aires of the 1930s. A spiral staircase leads to the elegant restaurant, where subdued lighting and well-spaced tables create an intimate atmosphere. Mediterranean herbs, olive oil, and sun-dried tomatoes are among the chef's usual ingredients. Dishes might include carefully prepared shellfish bouillabaisse; black hake served with ratatouille; chicken casserole with morels, fava beans, and potatoes; or duck breast with cabbage confit, wild mushrooms, and sautéed apples. Express menus (items ready within minutes) are available at lunch.

Moreno 809 (at Piedras in the InterContinental). ✆ **11/4340-7200.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$15 (£5.40–£10). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7–11am, 11:30am–3:30pm, and 7pm–midnight. Metro: Moreno.

PUERTO MADERO

There are no convenient metro stops to this neighborhood.

Expensive

Asia de Cuba ★ ASIAN/JAPANESE Though not associated with the other Asia de Cubas around the world, this place offers an exciting environment in which to dine. Renovated in 2008, the space is chic, with black-, dark-brown-, and gold-gilded carved columns decorated in lotuses, and a golden reclining Buddha over the bar. In the back, there's a sushi bar and a VIP lounge. It's very glamorous at dinnertime; lunch is a more casual affair. A table sushi menu, with 110 different items, is about $175 (£119). Dinner comes with all kinds of exotic entertainment, such as Arabian belly dancers. Asia de Cuba is also one of the most important clubs in the Puerto Madero area, ideal for a more

mature crowd because a large portion of its clientele is older than 40. Dancing begins at about 1am Tuesday to Saturday and there is no admission charge if you're already dining. If you do not eat here, admission ranges from $15 to $20 (£10–£14), depending on the day. The ideal is to come here late in the evening, dine, and stay around for a night of dancing.

P. Dealessi 750 (at Guemes on Dique 3). ✆ **11/4894-1328** or 11/4894-1329. w www.asiadecuba.com.ar. Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$20 (£6.80–£14). AE, MC, V. Daily 1pm–5am, often later on weekends. No metro access.

Cabaña las Lilas ★★★ ARGENTINE Widely considered the best *parrilla* in Buenos Aires, Cabaña las Lilas is always packed. The menu pays homage to Argentine beef, which comes from the restaurant's private *estancia* (ranch). The table "cover"—which includes dried tomatoes, mozzarella, olives, peppers, and delicious garlic bread—nicely whets the appetite. Clearly, you're here to order steak: The best cuts are the rib-eye, baby beef, and thin skirt steak. Order sautéed vegetables, grilled onions, or Provençal-style fries separately. Service is hurried but professional; ask your waiter to match a fine Argentine wine with your meal. The enormous eatery offers indoor and outdoor seating. In spite of its high prices, it's casual and informal; patrons come in suits or shorts. They also offer a large and very good salad bar, so even vegetarians can be happy here.

Alicia Moreau de Justo 516 (at Villaflor in Dique 3). ✆ **11/4313-1336.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$30 (£6.80–£20). AE, DC, V. Sun–Thurs noon–12:30am; Fri–Sat noon–1am. Metro: L. N. Alem.

Sorrento del Puerto ★★ ITALIAN When the city decided to reinvigorate the port in 1995, this was one of the first five restaurants opened (today you'll find more than 50). The sleek modern dining room boasts large windows, modern blue lighting, and tables and booths decorated with white linens and individual roses. The outdoor patio accommodates only 15 tables, but the inside is enormous. People come here for two reasons: great pasta and even better seafood. Choose your pasta and accompanying sauce: seafood, shrimp scampi, pesto, or four cheeses. The best seafood dishes include trout stuffed with crabmeat, sole with a Belle Marnier sauce, Galician-style octopus, paella Valenciana, and assorted grilled seafood for two. A three-course menu with a drink costs $12 (£8.20).

Av. Alicia Moreau de Justo 430 (at Guevara on Dique 4). ✆ **11/4319-8731.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$25 (£5.50–£14). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–4pm and 8pm–1am; Sat 8pm–2am. Metro: L. N. Alem.

Moderate

La Bisteca ★★ (Value) PARRILLA Puerto Madero's La Bisteca offers a wide range of meal choices at incredible value for the money. This is an all-you-can-eat establishment, locally called a *tenedor libre.* A three-course lunch is about $12 (£8.20), and dinner ranges from about $12 to $20 (£8.20–£14). If you came to Argentina for beef, definitely stop here. The high quality of the meat surprised me, considering the price and bottomless portions. There really was no limit to the number of times I could fill my plate at the various grills in the restaurant. For vegetarians, there is also a diverse salad bar. In spite of the restaurant's large size, the lighting and seating arrangements work to create small intimate spaces. At lunchtime, the place is full of businesspersons, while at night you'll find a mix of couples, friends, and families.

Av. Alicia Moreau de Justo 1890 (at Peñaloza on Dique 1). ✆ **11/4514-4999.** Main courses $5–$7 (£3.40–£4.75). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 8pm–1am. No metro access.

Puerto Cristal ★ INTERNATIONAL/SEAFOOD The menu here has everything, but fish is why patrons choose this restaurant above all the others in Puerto Madero. The place is enormous, with friendly hostesses and theatrical waiter service; a constant flurry of fresh silverware and dishes will cross your table between courses, befitting a much pricier establishment. Windows overlooking the port and glassed-in central garden amid the dining area lend tranquillity to the industrial-chic design. Great lunch specials are part of the draw here; their executive menu runs about $15 (£10) and usually includes a glass of champagne (though other drinks and the table cover will be additional).

Av. Alicia Moreau de Justo 1082 (at Villaflor in Dique 3). ✆ **11/4331-3669.** www.puerto-cristal.com.ar. Main courses $6–$20 (£4.05–£14). AE, MC, V. Sun–Fri 6:30am–midnight; Sat 6:30am–2am. No metro access.

RECOLETA

There are no convenient metro stops in this neighborhood.

Very Expensive

Piegari ★★ ITALIAN You would not expect to find such a fine restaurant under a highway overpass in a part of Recoleta dubbed "La Recova," meaning poultry business. Piegari has two restaurants located across the street from each other; the more formal focuses on Italian dishes, while the other (Piegari Vitello e Dolce) is mainly a *parrilla.* Both restaurants are excellent, but visit the formal Piegari for outstanding Italian cuisine, with an emphasis on seafood and pastas. Homemade spaghetti, six kinds of risotto, pan pizza, veal scallops, and black salmon ravioli are just a few of the mouthwatering choices. Huge portions are made for sharing, and an excellent eight-page wine list accompanies the menu. If you decide to try Piegari Vitello e Dolce instead, the best dishes are the short-rib roast and the leg of Patagonian lamb.

Posadas 1042 (at Av. 9 de Julio in La Recova, near the Four Seasons Hotel). ✆ **11/4328-4104.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $25–$45 (£17–£30). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3:30pm and 7:30pm–1am. No metro access.

Expensive

La Bourgogne ★★★ FRENCH The only Relais Gourmand in Argentina, Chef Jean Paul Bondoux serves the finest French and international food in the city here. *Travel + Leisure* magazine rated La Bourgogne the number-one restaurant in South America, and *Wine Spectator* called it one of the "Best Restaurants in the World for Wine Lovers." Decorated in elegant pastel hues, the formal dining room serves the city's top gourmands. To begin your meal, consider a warm foie gras scallop with honey-wine sauce, or perhaps the succulent *ravioli d'escargots.* Examples of the carefully prepared main courses include *Chateaubriand béarnaise,* roasted salmon, veal steak, and lamb with parsley-and-garlic sauce. The kitchen's fresh vegetables, fruits, herbs, and spices originate from Bondoux's private farm. Downstairs, **La Cave** offers a less formal experience, with a different menu, though the food comes from the same kitchen. Wine tastings are offered Thursday in the restaurant's wine-cellar area, called **Cave de Vines;** contact La Bourgogne directly for details.

Av. Alvear 1891 (at Ayacucho in the Alvear Palace Hotel). ✆ **11/4805-3857.** www.alvearpalace.com. Reservations required. Jacket and tie required for men. Main courses $20–$35 (£14–£24). AE, DC, MC, V. Free valet parking. Mon–Fri noon–3pm; Mon–Sat 8pm–midnight. Closed Jan. No metro access.

Lola ★ INTERNATIONAL Among the best-known international restaurants in Buenos Aires, Lola recently completed a makeover, turning its dining room into one of

the city's brightest and most contemporary. Caricatures of major personalities adorn the walls, and fresh plants and flowers give Lola's dining room a springlike atmosphere. A French-trained chef offers creative dishes such as chicken fricassee with leek sauce, grilled trout with lemon-grass butter and zucchini, and beef tenderloin stuffed with Gruyère cheese and mushrooms. The chef will prepare dishes for those with special dietary requirements as well.

Guido 1985 (at Junín). ✆ **11/4804-5959.** www.lolarestaurant.com/restaurant_ing.htm. Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$20 (£6.80–£14). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 7pm–1am. No metro access.

Moderate

El Mirasol ★★ PARRILLA One of the city's best *parrillas,* this restaurant serves thick cuts of fine Argentine beef. Like Piegari (see above), El Mirasol is also located in La Recova, but its glassed-in dining area full of plants and trellises gives the impression of dining outdoors. Your waiter will guide you through the selection of cuts, among which the rib-eye, tenderloin, sirloin, and ribs are most popular. A mammoth 2½-pound serving of tenderloin is a specialty, certainly meant for sharing. El Mirasol is part of a chain that first opened in 1967. The best dessert is an enticing combination of meringue, ice cream, whipped cream, *dulce de leche,* walnuts, and hot chocolate sauce. The wine list pays tribute to Argentine Malbec, Syrah, merlot, and cabernet sauvignon. El Mirasol, frequented by business executives and government officials at lunch and a more relaxed crowd at night, remains open throughout the afternoon.

Posadas 1032 (at Av. 9 de Julio in La Recova, near the Four Seasons Hotel). ✆ **11/4326-7322.** www.el-mirasol.com.ar. Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$40 (£5.40–£27). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2am. No metro access.

Le Mistral ★★ MEDITERRANEAN Formerly known as Galani, this elegant but informal restaurant in the Four Seasons Hotel serves Mediterranean cuisine with Italian and Asian influences. It has been completely redesigned from its previous incarnation, paying homage to Argentine materials such as leather and native woods. The executive lunch menu includes an antipasto buffet with seafood, cold cuts, cheese, and salads followed by a main course and dessert. From the dinner menu, the aged Angus New York strip makes an excellent choice. All grilled dishes come with béarnaise sauce or *chimichurri* (a thick herb sauce) and a choice of potatoes or seasonal vegetables. Organic chicken and fresh seafood join the menu, along with a terrific selection of desserts. Live harp music often accompanies meals, and tables are candlelit at night. Enjoy an after-dinner drink in Le Dôme, the split-level bar adjacent to the lobby featuring live piano music and occasional tango shows. The Sunday brunch, which runs about $35 (£19), is one of the best in Buenos Aires.

Posadas 1086 (at Av. 9 de Julio, in the Four Seasons Hotel). ✆ **11/4321-1234.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$25 (£8.20–£17). Sun brunch $35 (£24). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7–11am, noon–3pm, and 8pm–1am. No metro access.

Inexpensive

Café Victoria ★ CAFE Perfect for a relaxing afternoon in Recoleta, the cafe's outdoor patio is surrounded by flowers and shaded by an enormous tree. Sit and drink a coffee or enjoy a complete meal. The three-course express lunch menu offers a salad, main dish, and dessert, with a drink included. Afternoon tea with pastries and scones is served daily from 4 to 7pm. The cafe remains equally popular in the evening, with excellent people-watching

opportunities, when live music enlivens the patio. It's a great value for the area—the Recoleta Cemetery and cultural center are next door.

Roberto M. Ortiz 1865 (at Quintana). ✆ **11/4804-0016.** Main courses $6–$12 (£4.05–£8.20). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–11:30pm. No metro access.

Clark's ★ INTERNATIONAL The dining room here is an eclectic mix of oak, yellow lamps, live plants, and deer antlers. A slanted ceiling descends over the English-style bar with a fine selection of spirits; in back, a 3m-high (9 3/4-ft.) glass case showcases a winter garden. Booths and tables are covered with green-and-white checkered tablecloths and are usually occupied by North Americans. Specialties include tenderloin steak with goat cheese, sautéed shrimp with wild mushrooms, and sole with a sparkling wine, cream, and shrimp sauce. A number of pasta and rice dishes are offered as well. A large terrace attracts a fashionable crowd in summer.

Roberto M. Ortiz 1777 (at Quintana). ✆ **11/4801-9502.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$14 (£5.40–£9.45). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3:30pm and 7:30pm–midnight. No metro access.

Juana M ★★ Value PARRILLA This *parrilla* is hard to find but worth the effort, and remains one of my favorite dining spots in the city. A family-owned affair, it takes its name from its chic matriarch owner and is known almost solely to Porteños who want to keep this place all to themselves. Juana Marty and her husband Enrique can often be seen floating from table to table, checking in on customers to personally chat with them and make sure all is okay. Located in the basement of a former orphanage, which was once part of the city's Catholic University, this neoclassical building is one of the few saved from the highway demolition that created the nearby La Recova area, where Avenida 9 de Julio intersects with Libertador. This cavernous industrial-chic space can seat over 200 patrons. Art covers one of the walls lining the waiter stations. At night, when the space is lit only by candlelight, trendy young patrons flood in, chattering the night away. The menu is simple, high quality, and inexpensive, with a free unlimited salad bar with the *parrilla.* A new light menu with healthy options was also recently added. The restaurant may move to a new location by 2010 but will remain in Recoleta through 2009.

Carlos Pellegrini 1535 (basement; at Libertador). ✆ **11/4326-0462.** Main courses $5–$13 (£3.40–£8.80). AE, MC, V. Sun–Fri noon–5pm and 7:30pm–1am; Sat 8pm–2am. No metro access.

La Biela ★★★ CAFE Originally a small sidewalk cafe opened in 1850, La Biela earned its distinction in the 1950s as the rendezvous choice of race-car champions. Black-and-white photos of these Argentine racers decorate the huge dining room. Today artists, politicians, and neighborhood executives (as well as a very large number of tourists) all frequent La Biela, which serves breakfast, informal lunch plates, ice cream, and crepes. The outdoor terrace sits beneath an enormous 19th-century gum tree, opposite the church of Nuestra Señora del Pinar and the adjoining Recoleta Cemetery. This place ranks among the most important cafes in the city, with some of the best sidewalk viewing anywhere in Recoleta. You might just feel like you're in Paris when you come here. La Biela is a protected *bar notable.*

Av. Quintana 596 (at Alvear). ✆ **11/4804-0449.** Main courses $3–$12 (£2–£8.20). V. Daily 7am–3am. No metro access.

SAN TELMO

Expensive

Brasserie Petanque ★★ Moments FRENCH While the Swiss-born owner of this restaurant, Pascal Meyer, insists this is a brasserie and not a bistro . . . well, it's almost the

same thing and certainly looks like one. Newly made with the intention of looking old, the walls are soft yellows with old advertising posters and other decorations such as French flags politely tucked into corners. The stunning tile floor was redone in a turn-of-the-last-century style. The menu is in French and Spanish, and offers such specialties as steak tartare, lemon chicken, trout with almonds, and beef bordelaise. Chef Sebastian Fouillade worked with Alain Ducasse. Smaller children's portions of select main menu items are available about $10 (£6.80).

Defensa 596 (at Mexico). ✆ **11/4342-7930.** www.brasseriepetanque.com. Main courses $10–$25 (£6.80–£17). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Fri 12:30–3:30pm; Tues–Sun 8:30pm–midnight. Metro: Independencia.

Moderate

Bar El Federal ★★ Moments ARGENTINE/CAFE This bar and restaurant, on a quiet corner in San Telmo, presents a beautiful step back in time. Fortunately, as another *bar notable,* it will stay that way forever. The first thing that strikes you is the massive, carved-wood and stained-glass ornamental stand over the bar area. Local patrons sit at the old tables whiling away their time, chatting, or sitting with a book and drinking tea or espresso. The original tile floor remains, and old signs, portraits, and small antique machines decorate this space. In business since 1864, Bar El Federal is among the most Porteño of places in San Telmo, a neighborhood with more of these establishments than any other area. Some of the staff has been here for decades on end, and proudly so. Food is a collection of small, simple things, mostly sandwiches, steaks, *lomos* (sirloin cuts), with a very large salad selection. High-quality pastries are also served to complement the menu.

Corner of Perú and Carlos Calvo. ✆ **11/4300-4313.** Main courses $3–$10 (£2–£6.80). AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 7am–2am; Fri–Sat 7am–4am. Metro: Independencia.

Chez Café Resto FRENCH This historic house, once inhabited by Argentina's beloved poet and soldier Esteban de Luca (who wrote the country's first national anthem, the "Marcha Patriótica"), was built in 1786 and declared a National Historic Monument in 1941. In our last edition, this housed a restaurant taking the poet's name, but it has since been converted into a casual French bistro.

Calle Defensa 1000 (at Carlos Calvo). ✆ **11/4361-4338.** Main courses $8–$12 (£5.40–£8.20). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–4pm and 8pm–1am. Metro: Independencia.

Desnivel ★ PARRILLA This place brings new meaning to the term "greasy spoon." Everything in here has an oily sheen—from the slippery floor to the railings, glasses, and dishes. Even the walls and the artwork seem to bleed grease. Thankfully, the food more than makes up for the atmosphere: Serving mostly thick, well-cooked, and fatty steaks, this is one of San Telmo's best *parrillas.* A flood of locals and tourists, often lined up at the door, keeps the place hopping. On Sunday or when a game is on television, especially large crowds come to watch and eat under the blaring TV screen suspended over the dining area. The decor in this two-level restaurant is unassuming, home-style, and full of mismatched wooden chairs, tablecloths, and silverware. Unlike many other local restaurants that have inflated their prices in recent years, this *parrilla* has maintained its reasonably priced menu.

Defensa 858 (at Independencia). ✆ **11/4300-9081.** Main courses $5–$8 (£3.40–£5.40). No credit cards. Daily noon–4pm and 8pm–1am. Metro: Independencia.

La Brigada ★★★ ARGENTINE Known as one of the best *parrillas* in San Telmo, La Brigada is reminiscent of the Pampas, with gaucho memorabilia filling the restaurant. White-linen tablecloths and tango music complement the atmosphere. An upstairs dining

room faces an excellent walled wine rack. The best choices include the *asado* (short rib roast), *lomo* (sirloin steak, prepared with a mushroom or pepper sauce), baby beef (an enormous 850g/30 oz., served for two), and the *mollejas de chivito al verdero* (young goat sweetbreads in a scallion sauce). The Felipe Rutini merlot goes perfectly with baby beef and chorizo. The waiters are exceedingly nice and professional. It was explained to me that tourists had been driving locals away from this San Telmo favorite, but with prices now obviously being set to capture the tourism market, in some cases tripled from our last edition, this would appear to no longer be of concern for the management.

Estados Unidos 465 (at Bolívar). ✆ **11/4361-5557.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $4–$25 (£2.70–£17). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 8pm–midnight. Metro: Constitución.

La Coruña ★★ Moments CAFE/ARGENTINE This extremely authentic old cafe and restaurant bar, another of the *cafés notables* protected by law, is the kind of place where you'd expect your grandfather to have eaten when he was a teenager. This neighborhood hub draws young and old alike, who catch soccer games on television or quietly chat away as they order beer, small snacks, and sandwiches. The TV seems to be the only modern thing in here. Music plays from a wooden tabletop radio that must be from the 1950s, and two wooden refrigerators, dating from who knows when, are still used to store food. José Moreira and Manuela Lopéz, the old couple who own the place, obviously believe that if it ain't broke, there's no reason for a new one.

Bolívar 994 (at Carlos Calvo). ✆ **11/4362-7637.** Main courses $2–$4 (£1.35–£2.70). No credit cards. Daily 9am–10pm. Metro: Independencia.

La Vieja Rotisería ★★ Value PARRILLA/ITALIAN/ARGENTINE The slabs of meat sizzling at this *parrilla* are so huge you hope the cook doesn't drop one on his foot, which would put him out of commission and deprive you from eating at one of the best *parrillas* in San Telmo. Following the rule "simple is best," this place concentrates on the food, not the decor, and prices are reasonable. Mismatched vinyl tablecloths and old tacky prints and mirrors in baroque frames are part of the visual disorder here. But your eyes should be on the food. Steaks are thick and well prepared, but they also offer interesting twists on the meat here, such as *lomo* in tasty sauces. Pastas, salads, fish, and chicken are offered here, too—and the latter is served boneless so you don't have to waste any time chowing down on it. The place gets very crowded at night, so make reservations if you're coming after 9pm, to make sure you're not waiting outside the window looking in. While the food is excellent as ever, a recent renovation has relegated the grill to the back of the restaurant, so you can no longer watch in anticipation as your order is prepared.

Defensa 963 (at Estados Unidos). ✆ **11/4361-7019.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $2–$8 (£1.35–£5.40). No credit cards. Mon–Tues and Thurs noon–4:30pm and 8pm–12:30am; Fri–Sat noon–4pm and 8pm–1am; Sun noon–5:30pm and 8pm–12:30am. Metro: Independencia.

Pappa Deus ★ INTERNATIONAL/ARGENTINE An interesting menu every day of the week, live music shows, folkloric dancing, and jazz and blues on Friday and Saturday nights make this place one of the best alternatives to tango venues along Dorrego Plaza. This restaurant has moved around the corner from its old location. It still has a loft area for a more secluded dinner.

Humberto Primo 499 423 (at Bolivar). ✆ **11/4307-1751.** www.pappadeus.com.ar. Main courses $7–$13 (£4.75–£8.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 9am–2am; Fri–Sat 9am–4am (often later). Metro: Independencia.

Inexpensive

Medio y Medio ★ URUGUAYAN This place serves Uruguayan *chivitos,* which are *lomo* sandwiches. *Lomo* takes on a different meaning in Uruguay than in Argentina. In Argentina, it is only a cut of beef; in Uruguay, it can be steer, pork, or chicken, cut flat as a filet, served as a hot sandwich with a slice of ham, cheese, and an egg, with a garnish of tomatoes and lettuce. This is a crowded, busy place, especially at night when patrons sit outside under a canopy, at tables painted with *fileteado,* an Italian art of painted filigree borders that has become quintessentially Argentine. Live entertainment in the form of Spanish and folkloric music and tango is available lunchtime Monday through Wednesday, and nighttime Thursday through Sunday.

Chile 316 (at Defensa). ✆ **11/4300-7007.** Main courses $4–$10 (£2.70–£6.80). No credit cards. Mon–Tues noon–2am; Wed noon–3am; Thurs noon–4am; Fri noon–8am; Sat 24 hr. Metro: Independencia.

LA BOCA

There is no convenient subway service to this neighborhood. Wandering at night is not recommended.

Moderate

Barbería ARGENTINE/ITALIAN This is a La Boca institution, with a very colorful interior, old-style banisters, and a waitstaff that prides itself on its Italian La Boca heritage. It's very touristy, though, just steps away from El Caminito's flood of out-of-town visitors and tacky souvenir stands. The owners, Nancy and Gustavo, are often around visiting the diners and will tell you that members of the La Boca Juniors often pop in for a meal. Tango, folkloric, and even drag shows run from noon until 5pm on the sidewalk dining area in front of the cafe, which overlooks the harbor. While in our last edition this was considered overpriced, inflationary pressures in Buenos Aires mean that the prices are now reasonable, especially for such a tourist driven area, and the show is included in the price. Pastries such as the Neapolitan *sfogliatella,* a local tradition, are always available, and every dish comes with a generous helping of history. The staff is very friendly.

Pedro de Mendoza 1959 (at Caminito). ✆ **11/4303-8256.** Main courses $3–$9 (£2–£6.10). No credit cards. Daily 11am–6pm (later in summer if busy). No metro access.

La Perla CAFE/ARGENTINE This ancient cafe and bar is one of Buenos Aires's *cafés notables.* It dates from 1899 and has a beautiful interior, loaded with photos of the owners mingling with important visitors from around the world who have come to visit La Boca and this important stop on the tourist circuit. Bill Clinton is among the luminaries, and his image is among those most highlighted. Pizzas, *picadas,* and a range of coffees and drinks are on offer. If you're in La Boca, it's a good place to have a drink and soak up some atmosphere. Ironically, inflationary pressures throughout Buenos Aires mean that this is now a reasonably priced venue, and large numbers of locals often come now in a way they didn't before, adding authenticity to the bar.

Pedro de Mendoza 1899 (at Caminito). ✆ **11/4301-2985.** Main courses $3–$8 (£2–£5.40). No credit cards. Daily 7am–9pm. No metro access.

Inexpensive

El Obrero ★★★ Kids PARRILLA/ITALIAN/ARGENTINE Two old brothers from Barcelona, Marcelino and Francisco Castro, started this wonderful institution several decades ago in a remote, hard-to-find part of La Boca. Sadly, Francisco died a few years ago, and Marcelino no longer is able to work in the place. His children, Juan Carlos and

Pablo, have taken over and give the place the loving care their relatives once did. Here, you'll dine on thick, juicy, perfectly cooked steaks. Italian food, fish, and chicken are also in the offerings. You can order one-half and one-quarter portions of many items, which is great both because they give you so much and because it means you can bring the kids along without wasting food. Lots of Boca Juniors and other sports memorabilia hanging on the walls remind you that you're in one of the most important soccer/*fútbol* neighborhoods in the world. This is one of the only places I recommend for serious eating in La Boca, but tables fill up rapidly at 9pm, so reserve or come earlier. Note that you should arrive here by cab and have the restaurant call a cab for you when you leave at night. El Obrero is one of the best restaurants in Buenos Aires and should not be missed. However, though I have never personally had a problem in La Boca, it is considered a dangerous neighborhood at night.

Agustin R. Caffarena 64 (at Caboto). ✆ **11/4362-9912.** Main courses $3–$8 (£2–£5.40). No credit cards. Mon–Sat noon–4pm and 8:30pm–midnight (sometimes later). No metro access.

BARRIO NORTE

Moderate

Clásica y Moderna ★★ Finds AR GENTINE This restaurant helped save an important bookstore from extinction. The bookstore opened in this location in 1938, though the company dates from 1918. Emilio Robert Diaz was the original owner, and now his grandchildren run the place. In 1988, books were relegated to the back to make way for diners, but this is still one of the best bookstores for English-speaking tourists in the city. You'll find Buenos Aires photo and history books, as well as Argentine short-story collections, all translated into English. While this is a protected *café notable,* the interior has been completely stripped down to the exposed brick, giving the place a dark, industrial feel. Decorations overhead include old bicycles and signs, but it is a pleasant relaxed space, where it's easy to chat with the staff as you dine or sit at the bar. There are many light and healthful choices such as salads and soy burgers, on the menu, though because all come with fries, it evens out the caloric content. Mixed drinks start at about $5 (£2.75). Events of all kinds are held here too, from literary readings to plays, dance shows, and art exhibitions. Shows are held Wednesday to Saturday around 10pm, and there are sometimes two shows, the second one beginning after midnight.

Callao 892 (at Córdoba). ✆ **11/4812-8707** or 11/4811-3670. Reservations recommended for shows. Main courses $5–$15 (£3.40–£10). AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–1am. Bookstore hours: Mon–Sat 9am–1am; Sun 5pm–1am. Metro: Callao.

PALERMO

Very Expensive

Casa Cruz ★★ Finds ITALIAN/INTERNATIONAL Casa Cruz is one of the city's chicest restaurants. With its enormous polished-brass doors and lack of a sign on the door, you almost feel like you are entering a nightclub, and inside, the dark modern interior maintains the theme. The impressive round bar, always decorated with fresh flower arrangements, is the first thing you'll see before continuing on into the spacious dining area full of polished woods and red upholstery. The place takes its name from its owner, Juan Santa Cruz. This is his first venture into restaurants, and with the attention this restaurant has received in the national and international press, he has done exceedingly well. The menu here is eclectic and interesting, overseen by Germán Martitegui, the same chef who oversees the kitchen at Olsen. Rabbit, sea bass, Parma ham rolls, and other interesting and exotic ingredients go into the many flavorful dishes.

Uriarte 1658 (at Honduras). ✆ **11/4833-1112.** www.casa-cruz.com. Reservations highly recommended. Main courses $25–$45 (£17–£30). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 8:30pm–3am, later on weekends. No metro access.

Expensive

Cluny ★★★ INTERNATIONAL/ARGENTINE Cluny is casual but elegant, looking more like a modernist living room than a dining room, with neutral color patterns and bursts of burnt orange and mauve. A loft space sits above it all and is excellent for hiding away for private conversations or romance. Others choose to dine outside in the patio garden in the restaurant's front space. Sinatra and bossa nova music from the 1960s add to the soft, casual atmosphere. The food, overseen by the new chefs Luis Cambre and Juan Manuel Juarez, who took over from Matias Zuccarino, is the highlight here. There is a new emphasis on fish and fowl, from prawn risotto to spider crabs and duck magret. There are also many salmon and codfish dishes, and the interestingly named "Lamb cooked in two different ways." Beef, unlike in other Argentine restaurants, seems to be a second thought here, though it is well prepared. The extensive wine list runs over eight pages, offering the finest Argentine vintages from Catena Zapata to French imports hitting more than $250 (£169) a bottle. In the afternoon they have a fine British tea service, a distinctive feature more associated with the old dowager hotels in the center of the city rather than young and chic Palermo Viejo.

El Salvador 4618 (at Malabia). ✆ **11/4831-7176.** Reservations highly recommended. Main courses $15–$20 (£10–£14). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 12:30–4pm, 4–7:30pm (teatime), and 8pm–1am (sometimes later). Metro: Plaza Italia.

Olsen ★★ SCANDINAVIAN/SEAFOOD A bit of Scandinavia has landed in Argentina. Olsen is built into what was once a warehouse, and it soars to churchlike proportions and has a mezzanine with a few tables overlooking the main dining area. The interior, complete with a central round metal fireplace, has a 1960s mod feel to it, with blond woods, straight lines, and funky dish settings with orange, brown, and black circles on them. The place is set apart from the street by a large wooden fence, which leads into a patio garden overgrown with vines, complete with a metal sculpture fountain on an adjacent wall. It's an extremely tranquil space, with only a few chairs and tables set out here. They sink into the grass, giving the feeling of a living room that has succumbed to nature. Olsen, overseen by Germán Martitegui, who also overseas Casa Cruz, is very popular with tourists and locals alike; and most of the extremely attractive staff members speak English. Starters are fun and meant to be shared, such as an excellent selection of bagels, tiny pancakes, smoked salmon, smoked herring, caviar, and flavored cheeses and butters. Fish is the main point of this place, and a few of the meat dishes, though flavorful, tend to be on the dry side. Many people come just for the bar, and there is an enormous vodka selection kept in special super-cold freezers. Absolut rules this part of the restaurant and is available by the shot or the bottle. On Sunday, try their brunch, which begins at 10am.

Gorriti 5870 (at Carranza). ✆ **11/4776-7677.** restaurantolsen@netizon.com.ar. Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$25 (£8.20–£17). AE, MC, V. Tues–Thurs noon–1am; Fri–Sat 12:30pm–2:30am (sometimes later); Sun 10am–1am. No metro access.

Sullivan's Drink House IRISH/ARGENTINE Sullivan's still retains its green in its Emerald Isle decor, but has overhauled its menu in recent years, bringing it more in line with traditional Argentine fare. That means more beef and other *parrilla* items, and just a smattering of traditional Irish food. Sandwiches and children's meals are also on the

menu. Windows to the street give great views, and a VIP lounge decorated in Old English style is upstairs, serving as a cigar bar. On the rooftop there's a covered terrace offering even more dining space. In spite of the change in food, if you have come to drink as the Irish do, well, you're definitely in luck. Sullivan's has one of the most extensive imported whiskey menus in town, beginning at about $5 (£3.40) per serving. The luck of the Irish is indeed evident in the history of this restaurant: They opened on December 20, 2001, just days before the peso crisis, yet they have survived. If you're in Buenos Aires on St. Patrick's Day, this is definitely the place to be.

El Salvador 4919 (at Borges). ✆ **11/4832-6442.** Main courses $7–$12 (£4.75–£8.20). AE, V. Mon–Thurs 10:30am–2 or 3am; Fri–Sat 10:30am–5am; Sun noon–2:30am. Metro: Scalabrini Ortiz.

Te Mataré Ramírez ★★★ Finds INTERNATIONAL/FRENCH This is perhaps the most interesting and creative dining experience in Buenos Aires. Its symbol, an aroused fork with an extended and upright prong, gives you a clue as to the erotic nature of the restaurant. The name of the restaurant literally means "I am going to kill you, Ramírez." It comes from playful arguments the owner would have with a friend who was a sort of Casanova, and this was a threat the friend often heard from husbands with whose wives he was carrying on affairs. It's an erotic restaurant, both in its food and decor. The food is an interesting mix of flavors and textures. Sensual combinations include garlic and sun-dried tomatoes mixed with sweet elements and poured over sautéed or marinated meats. This emphasis on contrasts creates some of the most flavorful cooking in town. The ceilings are decorated with paintings of naked men and women with nothing more than high-heeled shoes, mixed in with naughty cherubs. Erotic art hangs on the walls, all of it for sale. The lighting is boudoir red, and wine is consumed out of antique cut-crystal glasses that cast red sparkles on the tablecloths. Black-clothed actors perform playfully racy shows on a small stage here, using hand-held puppets that do very naughty things. It's hard to describe this place as romantic, but certainly a dinner here could lead to post-meal hanky-panky when discussing the play's theme. Slow, soft music such as jazz and bossa nova plays as you eat, adding to the mood for love.

Paraguay 4062 (at Scalabrini Ortiz). ✆ **11/4831-9156.** www.tematareramirez.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$20 (£6.80–£14). AE, MC, V. Sun–Wed 9pm–midnight; Thurs–Fri 9pm–1am; Sat 9pm–2am. Metro: Scalabrini Ortiz.

Moderate

De Olivas i Lustres ★★ MEDITERRANEAN This magical restaurant opened in Palermo Viejo several years ago, building the foundation for the gastronomic paradise the neighborhood would soon become. The dining room displays eccentric antiques, olive jars, and wine bottles. The reasonably priced menu celebrates Mediterranean cuisine, with light soups, fresh fish, and sautéed vegetables as its focus. The breast of duck with lemon and honey is mouthwatering; there are also a number of *tapeos*—appetizer-size dishes. Best of all: For about $15 (£10) a person, you and your partner can share 15 sensational small plates—brought out individually, and building in adventurousness—over the course of a couple of hours. What I find most unique in the restaurant beyond the Mediterranean fare is the use of native and Incan ingredients in various dishes. If you have ever wanted to try alligator or llama, this is the place to do it.

Gorriti 3972 (at Medrano). ✆ **11/4867-3388.** www.deolivasilustres.com.ar. Reservations recommended. Main courses $6–$15 (£4.05–£10). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7:30pm–1:30am. Metro: Scalabrini Ortiz.

El Estanciero ★ Finds PARRILLA In most of the restaurants in the Las Cañitas section of Palermo, it's all about the glamour. Here, however, in the *parrilla* El Estanciero,

it's all about the beef, which I would argue is the best in the neighborhood. The portions are not the largest, but the cuts are amazingly flavorful, with just the right mix of fat to add tenderness. If you order the steak rare *(jugoso),* they know not to serve it nearly raw. The restaurant is in two levels, with sidewalk seating at the entrance and a covered open-air terrace above. Both floors have subtle gaucho-accented decor that does not overwhelm the senses with kitsch. Never as crowded as the other restaurants lining the street, it's a great option when the lines are too long at nearby hot spots.

Báez 202 (at Arguibel). ✆ **11/4899-0951.** Main courses $3–$12 (£2–£8.20). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 8pm–1am (until 2am weekends). Metro: Ministro Carranza.

Garbis ★★ Kids MIDDLE EASTERN If you're looking for great Middle Eastern food at reasonable prices or a spot to entertain the kids, Garbis has the answer. Kabobs, falafel, lamb, and other Middle Eastern mainstays are all on the menu, along with great, friendly service. The desert kitsch—in the form of tiled walls and brilliant colors—makes you think you've wound up far away from Argentina. A children's entertainment center will keep the kids happy while you dine. Tarot card readings on select days add fun for the adults. Call to find out the mystic's schedule. This is a chain, with additional restaurants in Belgrano and Villa Crespo.

Scalabrini Ortiz 3190 (at Cerviño). ✆ **11/4511-6600.** www.garbis.com.ar. Main courses $5–$15 (£3.40–£10). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 7–11:30pm. Metro: Scalabrini Ortiz.

Novecento ★★★ INTERNATIONAL With a sister restaurant in New York's SoHo, Novecento was a pioneer restaurant in Palermo's Las Cañitas neighborhood. Fashionable Porteños pack the New York–style bistro by 11pm, clinking wineglasses under a Canal Street sign or opting for the busy outdoor terrace. Waiters rush to keep their clients happy, with dishes such as salmon carpaccio and steak salad. The pastas and risotto are mouthwatering, but you may prefer a steak au poivre or a chicken brochette. Other wonderful choices include filet mignon, grilled Pacific salmon, and penne with wild mushrooms. Top it off with an Argentine wine. At night, by candlelight, it makes a romantic choice for couples. A large, separate, slightly sterile side room is available for spillover or to rent for private parties.

Báez 199 (at Arguibel). ✆ **11/4778-1900.** www.bistronovecento.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$15 (£5.40–£10). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 8pm–2am; Sun brunch 8am–noon. Metro: Ministro Carranza. 2nd location at Serrano 1549 (at Plaza Serrano). ✆ **11/4581-0278.** www.republicadeaca.com.ar. Main courses $4–$8 (£2.70–£5.40). No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 11am–2am; Fri–Sat 11am–6am. Metro: Plaza Italia.

Sushi Club JAPANESE This restaurant is part of a very popular chain, with many locations throughout the city, but this is one of its nicest outlets. The Sushi Club serves sushi and other Japanese cuisine in a modern clublike interior, with orange, black, and metallic elements. Fish is a big highlight of the menu, as is beef with Japanese seasonings. The sushi roll selection is enormous and creative; many of the offerings pay tribute to other international cuisines, using ingredients to match.

Ortega Y Gasset 1812 (at Arce). ✆ **0-810/222-SUSHI** (78744; toll-free). Main courses $4–$8 (£2.70–£5.40). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–5pm and 8pm–3am. Metro: Carranza.

Utopia Bar ARGENTINE/INTERNATIONAL More cozy and calm than some of the other bars that surround Plaza Serrano, this is an excellent place to grab a drink and a bite in this very trendy and busy neighborhood. Yellow walls and soothing rustic wooden tables add a sense of calm, though the live music, scheduled on an irregular basis,

can be loud at times. There is an emphasis on the drinks here, and breakfast has a large selection of flavored coffees, some prepared with whiskey. At night, pizza and sandwiches make up the bulk of the offerings. The upstairs, open-air terrace on the roof of the bar is one of the best places to sit, but it's small and hard to claim a spot. If a table is open, nab it.

Serrano 1590 (at Plaza Serrano). ✆ **11/4831-8572.** Main courses $2–$8 (£1.35–£540). AE, MC, V. Daily 24 hr. Metro: Plaza Italia.

Inexpensive

Bio ★★ (Finds) VEGETARIAN/MEDITERRANEAN In a nation where meat reigns supreme, finding an organic vegetarian restaurant is a near impossibility. Bio is the exception. Their "meat" is made on the premises from wheat, then marinated to add more flavor, making for an elevated, tasty variation on a hamburger. All the ingredients are organic, grown or produced strictly in Argentina. Piles of organic cheese line the counters near the chefs, who are happy to explain the processes by which they work. Quinoa, the ancient Incan grain, is also used in many of the dishes, some of which they describe as Mediterranean-Asian fusion, though with the combinations of so many unusual ingredients, anything goes. You have to try the quinoa risotto, one of the restaurant's main specialties, though everything here is simply delicious and fresh. Chairs and tables are painted a spring green, and, on warm days, a few tables are scattered on the sidewalk outside. This is also a great place for veg-heads to go shopping for snacks to bring back to their hotel. They have a small shop inside with organic chips, teas, cheeses, and even organic wine. They also do takeout—a delight if you want to bring something home with you.

Humboldt 2199 (at Guatemala). ✆ **11/4774-3880.** Main courses $8–$10 (£5.40–£6.80). No credit cards. Mon 9am–5pm; Tues–Sun 9am–1am (often later on weekends). No metro access.

Campo Bravo ★★ (Value) PARRILLA/ARGENTINE Everyone I know who knows Buenos Aires tests me on this place. Do I know of it, and what do I think? Well, I know it, and I love it! This place serves as the virtual center of the Las Cañitas dining scene. It's relaxed during the day but insane at night. Dining on the sidewalk here, you'll get a great view of the glamorous crowds emerging from taxis to kick off their night in this exciting neighborhood. The *parrilla* serves up basic Argentine cuisine, and its enormous slabs of meat are served on wooden boards. A large, efficient waitstaff will take care of you, but they can't do anything about the long wait for an outside table on weekends—sometimes as long as 40 minutes to an hour. There's no way around that, since they don't accept reservations. So do as the locals do on Saturday night: Get a glass of champagne and sip it on the street amid what looks like a well-dressed and over-age frat party. A limited wine selection and imported whiskeys are also part of the drink selection. Can't handle the late nights in Argentina? Well, then you're in luck—they don't close between lunch and dinner, so people used to North American dining schedules can still enjoy a great meal here without a wait.

Báez 292 (at Arévalo). ✆ **11/4514-5820.** Main courses $6–$11 (£4.05–£7.45). AE, MC. Mon 6pm–4am; Tues–Sun 11:30am–4am (often later on weekends). Metro: Carranza.

Confitería del Botánico CAFE/ARGENTINE Stop here after visiting the nearby zoo or Botanical Gardens. It's on a pleasant corner on busy Santa Fe, but the green spaces of the gardens and Plaza Siria give it a more tranquil feel. Enormous windows seem to bring the park inside. Continental breakfast here is inexpensive, and you can also order from the entire menu any time of day (omelets from the dinner menu make a hearty

breakfast). Lunch specials run $3 to $4 (£2–£2.70). They also do takeout, which makes a great picnic for the park or zoo.

Av. Santa Fe (at República Siria). ✆ **11/4833-5515.** Main courses $2–$4 (£1.35–£2.70). AE, MC, V. Sun–Fri 6:30am–midnight; Sat 6:30am–2am. Metro: Plaza Italia.

Macondo Bar ★★ INTERNATIONAL/ARGENTINE Macondo Bar is one of the stars of Plaza Serrano, with sidewalk seating and lots of levels overlooking the action. Inside, the restaurant twists around several staircases and low ceilings. It's a loud and busy place, for sure, but the setup creates a sense of intimacy if you come here with friends to share conversation over drinks and a meal. Sandwiches, pizzas, salads, and *picadas* make up the menu. DJs blast music of all kinds through the bar, from folkloric to techno to electronica. Technically, there's no live music, but sometimes people come around and play on the street in front of the bar.

Borges 1810 (at Plaza Serrano). ✆ **11/4831-4174.** Main courses $1–$5 (70p–£3.40). No credit cards. Mon–Thurs 6pm–4am; Fri–Sat 5pm–7am; Sun 5pm–3am. Metro: Plaza Italia.

Malouva CAFE This is a great location at any time, but it's best late at night when you have the munchies after barhopping in Palermo Viejo. Malouva is open 24 hours and was here long before the neighborhood around it got trendy. As such, you're not here for sophistication but, rather, for the simple menu items and the drink selection. Cheap offerings include salads, pastries, sandwiches, and pizzas. On the downside, service can be slow, and they don't seem to have enough staff for both the indoor and outdoor seating sections. Nevertheless, lots of young local people come here, making weekends especially crowded, with kids conversing over large bottles of Quilmes beer. If you're not staying nearby, don't worry about getting a cab from here: It's across the street from a gas station where taxi drivers clean and fuel up, so it's easy to get a car from here to anywhere. In fact, the table next to yours may be full of taxi drivers taking a break from their long days.

Charcas 4401 (at Thames). ✆ **11/4774-0427.** Main courses $3–$9 (£2–£6.10). No credit cards. Daily 24 hr. Metro: Plaza Italia.

Tazz ★ MEXICAN In an old house, like so many other restaurants in Palermo Viejo, Tazz is one of the best spots for outdoor seating on all of Plaza Serrano. Step inside, however, and you'll think you've entered the dining hall of a spaceship, with blue glowing lights and walls, mod aluminum panels, and billiard table after billiard table. The booths look like little emergency space capsules that can be released if the mother ship gets attacked. The bulk of the menu is Mexican (there are hardly any other Mexican restaurants in Buenos Aires). Pitchers of sangria and margaritas add to the fun. More of a bar than a restaurant, this place is very popular, with a very young clientele.

Serrano 1556 (at Plaza Serrano). ✆ **11/4833-5164.** www.tazzbars.com. Main courses $4–$8 (£2.70–£5.40). No credit cards. Sun–Thurs noon–3am; Fri–Sat noon–6am. Metro: Plaza Italia.

Viejo Agump ★ Finds MIDDLE EASTERN In the heart of the old Armenian section of Buenos Aires, owner Elizabeth Hounanjian offers authentic Middle Eastern cuisine and a new hub for her compatriots ("agump" means "club" or "meeting place" in Armenian), in the shadows of the Armenian church and the community center. The exposed-brick interior of the old house adds a touch of comfort to the dining area, where mainstays include kabobs and baklava. Sidewalk seating on this tree-lined street is a delight in warm weather. A special menu is offered for about $12 (£8.20), with entree, main dish, and a drink. On weekends, Arabic belly dancing and coffee-bean readings heighten the exotic atmosphere. To arrange a reading, contact the mystic Roxana

Banklian and schedule an appointment (✆ **11/15-4185-2225** [cell]; roxanabanklian@arnet.com.ar).

Armenia 1382 (at José Antonio Cabrera). ✆ **11/4773-5081.** www.viejoagump.com.ar. Main courses $4–$8 (£2.70–£5.40). No credit cards. Mon–Thurs 8am–midnight; Fri 8am–2am; Sat 11am–2am. Metro: Scalabrini Ortiz.

CONGRESO

Moderate

La Moncloa ★ (Value) CAFE The surrounding trees here give a calming sense to sidewalk eating in what is normally a busy area on a street just off Plaza Congreso. La Moncloa takes its name from a famous Spanish palace. Basic Argentine fare such as empanadas, steaks, and salads is on offer, along with croissant sandwiches and an extensive dessert menu. There is also a large selection of pork dishes, including the tempting pork in white-wine sauce. Still, for the diet conscious, there is also a low-calorie menu with vegetarian offerings. Whatever you order, I recommend taking the time for a break in this restaurant's parklike setting. Coffee runs about a dollar and mixed drinks start at $3 (£2). Flavored and alcoholic coffees, another of their specialties, are about $5 (£3.40). If you don't have time to eat, stop by and grab a menu, as they'll deliver to local hotels.

Av. de Mayo 1500 (at Sáenz Peña). ✆ **11/4381-3357** or 11/4382-7194. Main courses $3–$9 (£2–£6.10). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–2am. Metro: Sáenz Peña.

Plaza Asturias ★★ (Finds) SPANISH/ITALIAN/ARGENTINE This decades-old place on Avenida de Mayo is about as authentic as it gets, packed mostly with Porteños who want to keep this place to themselves. Food has touches of Italian, Argentine, and most importantly, authentic Spanish cuisine. They are so busy and have to keep so much food on hand that there are legs of cured ham literally hanging from the rafters over the diners' heads. Steaks are as thick as the crowds waiting to get into this place, and among their specialties are Spanish casseroles and lots of food with various sauces. Fish is also a big highlight. ***Be warned:*** The staff is so busy yelling out orders to the kitchen and bringing food to the tables that you can get hurt trying to find the bathroom.

Av. de Mayo 1199 (at San José). ✆ **11/4382-7334.** Main courses $6–$10 (£4.05–£6.80). No credit cards. Daily noon–3am. Metro: Sáenz Peña.

Plaza del Carmen CAFE/ARGENTINE This is part of a chain, slightly sterile and clean. However, the best part of this cafe is not inside but the view from this corner overlooking Congreso outside. Generally open 24 hours, no matter what time of day it is you can find people having nothing more than croissants and coffee here. Weekdays, the outdoor seating area is a little overwhelming, as there is a huge amount of traffic flowing by this corner. But inside, protected from the noise and the bus and car fumes, everything is just fine. Wait until the weekends, when the sidewalk is less busy and the outdoor area becomes ideal. This restaurant offers standard Argentine cuisine in addition to a healthy choice of salads and other light items. Pizzas, pastas, and other Italian items round out the menu.

Rivadavia 1795 (at Callao). ✆ **11/4374-8477.** Main courses $5–$8 (£3.40–£5.40). AE, MC, V. Daily 24 hr. Metro: Congreso.

Inexpensive

Café de Madres de Plaza de Mayo ★★ (Moments) CAFE The official name of this cafe is Café Literario Osvaldo Bayer, named for an Argentine political intellectual. This

cafe is located inside the lobby of the headquarters and teaching center of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, just off of Plaza Congreso. What makes the place so special is its location and its left-wing political atmosphere. In few other places in Buenos Aires can you speak so freely with those who had family members disappear during Argentina's military dictatorship, or with young students who have come to study in this building and continue seeking justice in this cause. The Madres bookstore is just to the side of the cafe, and it's full of books and newspapers on liberal causes from throughout Latin America. It also has one of the largest collections of books on Che Guevara anywhere in the world. An Argentine native, he is a personal hero to many of the Madres, and his image adorns walls throughout the building. The restaurant here recently expanded (it used to be just snacks and sandwiches and some desserts, all self-service from the snack bar). Waitress service has been added along with an outdoor seating area, one of the side effects of the smoking ban. Prices have gone up slightly, and new offerings include simple pasta dishes and a new selection of Italian pastries.

Hipólito Yrigoyen 1584 (at Ceballos). ✆ **11/4382-3261.** Main courses $3–$8 (£2–£5.40). No credit cards. Mon–Fri 8:30am–10:30pm; Sat (and some Sun) 11am–5pm. Metro: Congreso.

La Americana ★★ ARGENTINE/ITALIAN This place calls itself "La Reina de las Empanadas" (the Queen of Empanadas), and that indeed it is. They offer an enormous range of empanadas, all made with a very light dough and slightly burned edges; they're never heavy or greasy. The place is busy and loud, with the constant din of conversation bouncing off the tile-and-stone walls and the plate-glass windows looking out over Callao. There are tables here as well as a takeout section and an area for standing and eating—some people just can't be bothered to sit and simply scarf down these delicious creations once they get them. The place looks like many of the fast-food-chain empanada emporiums, but don't confuse it with them; this is the only one of its kind. Waiters are frantic, scurrying from table to table as people change their minds after one bite and order extra rounds. You'll have to keep reminding them of what you ordered if you feel it's taking too much time, but don't blame them: It's just too busy for normal humans to keep up with the pace of the place. Italian specialties such as calzones and pizzas round out the menu choices. Deliveries can be made to nearby hotels.

Callao 83 (at Bartolomé Mitre). ✆ **11/4371-0202.** Main courses $1–$7 (70p–£4.75). No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 7am–2am; Fri–Sat 7am–3am. Metro: Congreso.

ABASTO & ONCE

Moderate

El Galope ★ ARGENTINE/PARRILLA/MIDDLE EASTERN/KOSHER This is one of Buenos Aires's most popular kosher restaurants, located in what was once the main area of Buenos Aires's Jewish community. This place is best described as an Argentine *parrilla* with Middle Eastern accents. It serves wonderfully juicy and kosher slabs of beef (my experience in the United States has always been that beef plus kosher equals dry, so I am not sure how they do it). The interior is simple, wood paneled, and home-style. The family that owns the restaurant oversees its operations; sometimes they argue right in front of you. The menu also features a selection of kosher Argentine wines, and you can take a bottle home with you if you'd like. Middle Eastern fare—such as pitas and hummus as starters or sides, and baklava desserts—is also on hand, as well as fast food such as pastrami sandwiches and salads. Service is low-key; unusually quiet waiters almost seem afraid to approach the tables, but the food more than makes up for it.

Tucumán 2633 (at Pueyrredón). ✆ **11/4963-6888.** Main courses $3–$12 (£2–£8.20). No credit cards. Sun–Fri noon–3pm; Sun–Thurs 8pm–1am; Sat 9pm–midnight, but times will vary seasonally depending on sunset and Jewish holidays. Metro: Pueyrredón.

Mamá Jacinta ★★ Finds INTERNATIONAL/ITALIAN/KOSHER/MIDDLE EASTERN/PARRILLA Owner José Mizrahi opened this restaurant in 1999 and named it in honor of his Syrian Sephardic grandmother. His idea was to bring to the public the kind of food he remembers eating while growing up, updating it with the international influences that are all the rage in Argentina. He does much of the cooking himself, and chicken dishes are his favorite thing to make. After that, he recommends his fish and rice salad dishes, served in large enough portions for a table full of patrons to share and enjoy together. French, Japanese, and Italian sausages are grilled on the *parrilla* and can be sampled as starters. Pasta lovers can choose from a wide selection, all custom-made in the restaurant. Try also the *kibbe,* a kind of meat-filled dumpling.

Tucumán 2580 (at Paso). ✆ **11/4962-9149** or 11/4962-7535. mamajacintakosher@hotmail.com. Main courses $3–$12 (£2–£8.20). No credit cards. Mon–Thurs noon–3:30pm and 8–11:30pm; Fri noon–3:30pm; Sat 1 hr. after sunset until midnight; Sun noon–3:30pm, but times will vary seasonally depending on sunset and Jewish holidays. Metro: Pueyrredón.

Inexpensive

Gardel de Buenos Aires ★ ARGENTINE/ITALIAN You won't see tango here, but this cafe celebrates the famous tango singer Carlos Gardel in other ways. A clock, with his face at the 12 o'clock position, overlooks the dining area, with its brilliant red tablecloths and rich wood trim. Gardel photos adorn red walls like icons in a Russian church. A papier-mâché mannequin of his likeness juts out from one of the walls. On top of that, his songs play nonstop from loudspeakers. It's a cute diversion, and in spite of the overwhelming kitsch, the food is good. The menu offers Argentine standards such as beef and empanadas, salads, pastas, desserts, sandwiches, pizzas, and other Italian specialties. The house specialty is *fugazzata*—a kind of stuffed pizza. Service is fast and friendly, so this is a great place for grabbing a quick coffee or a sandwich. It's open 24 hours Friday and Saturday, so come by and toast Gardel after a night on the town tangoing, with a drink from their extensive liquor selection. They also have a takeout menu.

Entre Ríos 796 (at Independencia). ✆ **11/4381-4170.** Main courses $3–$10 (£2–£6.80). AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 6am–2am; Fri–Sat 24 hr. Metro: Entre Ríos.

Kosher McDonald's ★★ Finds AMERICAN/KOSHER Certainly you didn't come all this way to eat at McDonald's. I wouldn't ordinarily tell a traveler to eat here on vacation, but this franchise is clearly unique: This is the only kosher McDonald's outside of Israel in the world, underscoring Buenos Aires's reputation as one of the world's greatest Jewish centers. Rabbi supervision makes sure that kosher rules are strictly followed here. It's typical McDonald's fare—burgers, fries, salads, fish sandwiches—except that no dairy at all is served here. They also sell souvenir mugs and other items to bring home. Locals of all kinds, Jewish or not, patronize the place. If you only came to gawk and think you couldn't stand a Big Mac without cheese, fret not: It's in the Abasto Shopping Center's Food Court, so all you have to do is turn around and walk to the regular McDonald's on the other side.

Abasto Shopping Center Food Court, Av. Corrientes 3247 (at Agüero). ✆ **11/4959-3709** or 0800/777-6236 for McDonald's Argentina information hot line. Main courses $1–$3 (70p–£2). No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 10am–midnight; Fri 10am–2pm; Sat 9pm–midnight, but times will vary seasonally depending on sunset and Jewish holidays. Metro: Carlos Gardel.

BELGRANO

Expensive

Buddha BA ★ CHINESE In the heart of Belgrano's Chinatown, this very elegant, two-level Chinese teahouse and restaurant is built into a house, with an adjacent garden and art gallery selling fine Asian art and antiques. The interesting and creatively named menu includes items such as Dragon Fire, a mix of spicy chicken and curried *lomo;* or Buddha Tears, squid in a soy and chicken broth sauce with seasoned vegetables. The atmosphere is very welcoming and makes a great rest stop if you're exploring this neighborhood in depth.

Arribeños 2288 (at Mendoza). ✆ **11/4706-2382.** www.buddhaba.com.ar. Main courses $8–$15 (£5.40–£10). MC, V. Wed–Sun 8:30–11:30pm; Sat–Sun 12:30–3:30pm; tea service Wed–Sun 4–7:30pm. Metro: Juramento.

4 WHAT TO SEE & DO

Buenos Aires is wonderful to explore and fairly easy to navigate. The most impressive historical sites surround Plaza de Mayo, although you will certainly experience Argentine history in neighborhoods such as La Boca and San Telmo, too. Don't miss a walk along the riverfront in Puerto Madero or an afternoon among the plazas and cafes of Recoleta or Palermo. Numerous sidewalk cafes offer respite for weary feet, and good public transportation or a quick cab is available to carry you from neighborhood to neighborhood.

Your first stop should be one of the city tourism centers (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter) to pick up a brochure, city map, and advice. You can also ask at your hotel for a copy of "The Golden Map" and *QuickGuide Buenos Aires,* to help you navigate the city and locate its major attractions.

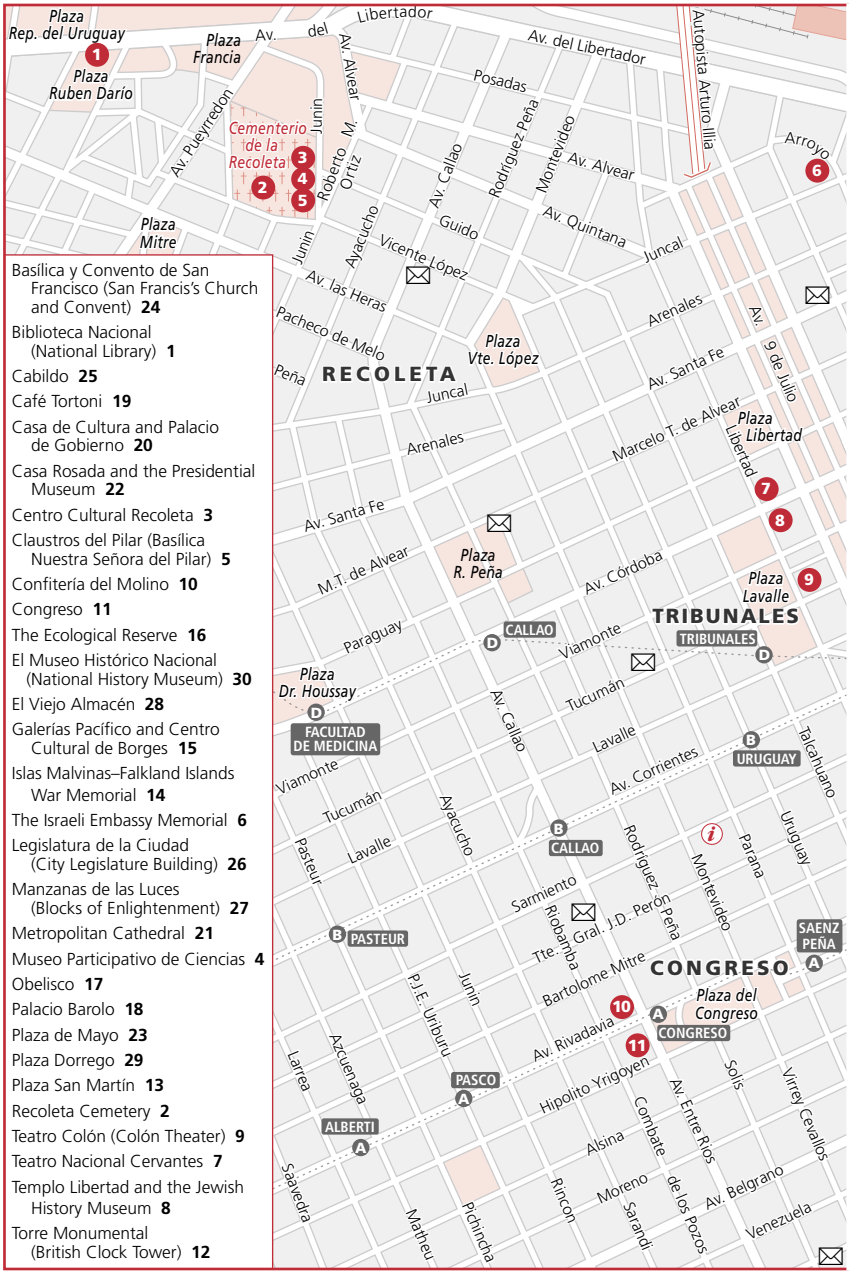
NEIGHBORHOODS TO EXPLORE

La Boca

La Boca, on the banks of the Río Riachuelo, developed originally as a trading center and shipyard. This was the city's first Little Italy, giving the neighborhood its distinct flavor. La Boca is most famous for giving birth to the tango in the numerous bordellos, once known locally as *quilombos,* which once served the largely male population.

The focus of La Boca is the **Caminito,** a pedestrian walkway, named ironically after a tango song about a rural village. The walkway is lined with humorously sculpted statues and murals explaining its history. Surrounding the cobblestone street are corrugated metal houses painted in a hodgepodge of colors, recalling a time when the poor locals decorated with whatever paint was left over from ship maintenance in the nearby harbor. Today many artists live or set up their studios in these houses. Art and souvenir vendors work side by side with tango performers along the Caminito; this Caminito "Fine Arts Fair" is open daily from 10am to 6pm.

A victim of its own success, La Boca has become an obscene tourist trap. While the area is historically important, most of what you will encounter is overpriced souvenir and T-shirt shops and constant harassment from people trying to hand you flyers for mediocre restaurants. In the summer, the smell from the heavily polluted river becomes almost overbearing. This area is a requisite stop, for at least a quick look, but if you are short on time, don't let the visit take up too much of your day. Ironically, with prices climbing



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- Cabildo **25**
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- Claustros del Pilar (Basílica Nuestra Señora del Pilar) **5**
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- Templo Libertad and the Jewish History Museum **8**
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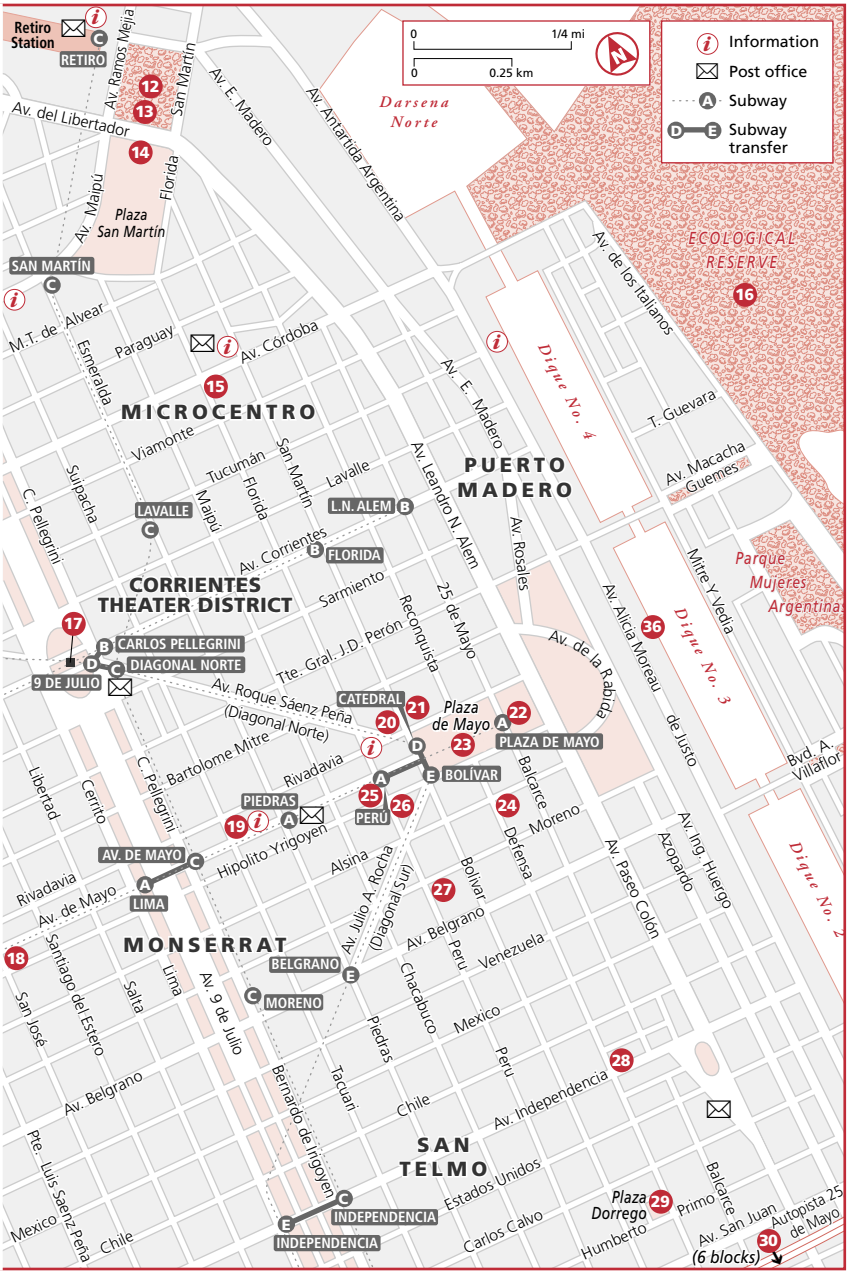
Retiro Station
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Post office
Subway
Subway transfer
Av. del Libertador
Florida
Av. Maipú
Plaza San Martín
SAN MARTÍN
M.T. de Alvear
Esmeralda
Paraguay
Av. Córdoba
MICROCENTRO
Viamonte
Tucumán
San Martín
Lavalle
Florida
Maipú
Suipacha
C. Pellegrini
LAVALLE
L.N. ALEM
FLORIDA
Av. Corrientes
CORRIENTES THEATER DISTRICT
Sarmiento
Av. Leandro N. Alem
Av. E. Madero
PUERTO MADERO
Dique No. 4
Av. de los Italianos
ECOLOGICAL RESERVE
T. Guevara
Av. Macacha Guemes
Av. Rosales
Av. de la Rábida
Av. Alicia Moreau de Justo
Dique No. 3
Mitre Y Vedia
Parque Mujeres Argentinas
CARLOS PELLEGRINI
DIAGONAL NORTE
9 DE JULIO
Tte. Gral. J.D. Perón
Reconquista
25 de Mayo
Av. Roque Sáenz Peña (Diagonal Norte)
CATEDRAL
Plaza de Mayo
PLAZA DE MAYO
C. Bartolome Mitre
Rivadavia
BOLÍVAR
Libertad
Cerrito
PIEDRAS
PERÚ
Balcarce
Moreno
Defensa
Av. Paseo Colón
Av. Ing. Huergo
Azopardo
Byd. A. Villafor
Dique No. 2
AV. DE MAYO
Hipolito Yrigoyen
Alsina
Av. Julio A. Roca (Diagonal Sur)
Bolivar
Av. de Mayo
LIMA
MONSERRAT
Av. Belgrano
Peru
Venezuela
Santiago del Estero
Salta
Lima
Av. 9 de Julio
BELGRANO
MORENO
Chacabuco
Piedras
Mexico
San José
Tacuari
Bernardo de Irigoyen
Peru
Av. Belgrano
Av. Independencia
Pte. Luis Saenz Peña
Chile
SAN TELMO
Estados Unidos
Plaza Dorrego
Primo de Balcarce
Mexico
Chile
INDEPENDENCIA
INDEPENDENCIA
Carlos Calvo
Humberto
Av. San Juan
Autopista 25 de Mayo
(6 blocks)
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throughout Buenos Aires at restaurants geared toward tourists, prices here, once not reasonable, have stabilized, and even locals are beginning to patronize some of them.

The city of Buenos Aires has wonderful plans to rebuild the La Boca waterfront, replant dead and decaying trees on many thoroughfares, and open new museums throughout the neighborhood, as well as connect a tourist train from the Puerto Madero area. Much of this work, tentatively slated for completion by the 2010 national centennial celebrations, has been put on hold due to budget cuts. If this is resolved, how it will impact the neighborhood—including gentrification to push out the poor local residents—remains to be seen. It will certainly reduce crime, however, by bringing more foot traffic through the area at night. Enhanced police presence later in the day aimed at protecting tourists, in addition to the infrastructure changes, is another of the city's goals for the area, but remains elusive at the time of this writing.

For now, what remains authentic in La Boca is off the beaten path, such as the art galleries and theaters that cater both to locals and tourists, or the world-famous **Estadio de Boca Juniors,** 4 blocks away in a garbage-strewn lot at the corner of calles Del Valle Iberlucea and Brandsen. This is the home of the *fútbol* (soccer) club Boca Juniors, the team of Diego Maradona who, like his country, went from glory to fiery collapse and back again all in a Buenos Aires minute. Go on game day, when street parties and general debauchery take over the area. For information on *fútbol* games, see the *Buenos Aires Herald.* Wealthy businessman Mauricio Macri, the former president of the Boca Juniors Fútbol Club, opened a museum in the stadium. He claims to love soccer, but as a political aspirant who became mayor of Buenos Aires, and who hopes to one day become president of Argentina, he can use the Juniors as a wonderful public relations tool.

Use caution, however, if you stray off the Caminito. Surrounding areas can be unsafe, without police presence. Once the shopkeepers go home, so do the police officers. At dusk, away from the Caminito, neighborhood residents quietly reclaim the streets and stroll along the water front. Most come not from Italy now, but from the poor interior provinces of the country. You may have your most interesting interactions with locals at this time, but it's risky and it would in no way be advisable for a naive, non-Spanish speaking tourist to try this. The area is also prone to flooding, so be careful to avoid the neighborhood in intense rainfall.

Caution: After nightfall, avoid La Boca altogether.

San Telmo

Buenos Aires's oldest neighborhood, San Telmo originally housed the city's elite. When yellow fever struck in the 1870s—aggravated by substandard hygienic conditions in the area—the aristocrats moved north. Poor European immigrants soon filled the neighborhood, and the houses were converted to tenements, called *conventillos.* In 1970, the city passed regulations to restore some of San Telmo's architectural landmarks. Still, gentrification has been a slow process, and the neighborhood maintains a gently decayed, very authentic atmosphere, reminiscent of Cuba's old Havana. It's a bohemian enclave, attracting tourists, locals, and performers daily. The ups and downs of the peso, and Argentina's economy in general, have also meant that a glut of antiques, sold for ready cash, are available for purchase and export. The best shops and markets line **Calle Defensa.**

After Plaza de Mayo, **Plaza Dorrego** is the oldest square in the city. Originally the site of a Bethlehemite monastery, the plaza is also where Argentines met to reconfirm their Declaration of Independence from Spain. On Sunday from 10am to 5pm (and often even later in summer), the city's best **antiques market** ★★★ takes over the square.

Here, you can buy leather, silver, handicrafts, and antiques, along with other products, and tango and *milonga* dancers perform on the square. The tall, darkly handsome dancer nicknamed El Indio is the star of the plaza, but there are many others who have made their name here as well.

San Telmo is full of tango clubs and shows; one of the most notable is **El Viejo Almacén** ★ (at Independencia and Balcarce). The colonial structure was built in 1798 as a general store and hospital, before its reincarnation as the quintessential Argentine tango club. Make sure to go for a show at night (see "Buenos Aires After Dark," later in this chapter). If you get the urge for a tango course while you're in San Telmo, look for signs advertising lessons in the windows of clubs. If you look foreign or unsure enough, teachers might find their way to you anyway, but use caution when dealing with any stranger who approaches you on the street.

Palermo ★★★

"Palermo" is a catchall term for a nebulously defined large chunk of northern Buenos Aires. It encompasses **Palermo** proper, with its park system, also known as **Palermo Alto; Palermo Chico; Palermo Viejo,** which is further divided into **Palermo Soho** and **Palermo Hollywood;** and **Las Cañitas,** next to the city's world-famous polo field.

Palermo Chico is an exclusive neighborhood of elegant mansions off Avenida Libertador, where prices were seemingly unaffected by the peso crisis. This small set of streets, tucked behind the Malba museum area, has little of interest to tourists besides the beauty of the homes and a few embassy buildings.

Palermo is a neighborhood of parks filled with jacarandas, magnolias, pines, palms, and willows, where families picnic on weekends and couples stroll at sunset. Designed by French architect Charles Thays, the parks take their inspiration from London's Hyde Park and Paris's Bois de Boulogne. Take the metro to Plaza Italia, which lets you out next to the **Botanical Gardens** ★ (✆ **11/4831-2951**) and **Zoological Gardens** ★ (✆ **11/4806-7412**), open dawn to dusk. Stone paths wind their way through the botanical gardens, where a student might escape hurried city life to study on a park bench. Flora from throughout South America fills the garden, with over 8,000 plant species from around the world represented. Next door, the city zoo features an impressive diversity of animals, including indigenous birds and monkeys, giant turtles, llamas, elephants, and a polar bear and brown bear habitat. The eclectic kitschy architecture housing the animals, some designed as exotic temples, is as much of a delight as the inhabitants and speaks to the vast wealth and self-conscious architecture from the zoo's turn-of-the-last-century origins. Peacocks and some of the small animals roam free, and feeding is allowed. Kiosks sell special food in the zoo, a wonderful opportunity that children will especially enjoy.

Parque Tres de Febrero ★★, a 400-hectare (1,000-acre) paradise of trees, lakes, and walking trails, begins just past the lovely **Rose Garden** ★ off Avenida Sarmiento. In summer, paddleboats are rented by the hour. The **Jardín Botánico,** off Plaza Italia, is another paradise, with many specially labeled South American plants. It is famous for its population of abandoned cats, tended by little old ladies from the neighborhood—a delight for kids to watch. With its small interior fountains and gravel walkways, it has a strong European feel. Nearby, small streams and lakes meander through the **Japanese Garden** ★★ (✆ **11/4804-4922;** daily 10am–6pm; admission is about $1/70p), where children can feed the fish (*alimento para peces* means "fish food") and watch the ducks. Small wood bridges connect classical Japanese gardens surrounding the artificial lake. A simple restaurant offers tea, pastries, sandwiches, and a few Japanese dishes such as sushi

and teriyaki chicken. A Japanese cultural center is located on the grounds, and you'll also find notes posted for various Asian events throughout the city.

Previous visitors to the parks within Palermo will notice security changes that do impact a visit here. As a result of vandalism and theft, driven both by increased poverty and the high value of metals, many statues and fountains are now surrounded by high gates, and sections of the park are locked at night. You can still look at the statues, of course, but many are impossible to get close to.

Palermo Viejo—once a run-down neighborhood of warehouses, factories, and tiny decaying stucco homes (called *chorizo,* or sausage houses, due to their elongated shape), where few cared to live as recently as 15 years ago—has transformed into the city's most chic destination. Railroad tracks and Avenida Juan B. Justo further officially divide the neighborhood into **Palermo Soho** to the south and **Palermo Hollywood** to the north, though many establishments will say they are in one or the other incorrectly. The center of Palermo Hollywood is Plazaleto Jorge Cortazar, better known by its informal name, Plaza Serrano, a small oval park at the intersection of calles Serrano and Honduras. Take note that Calle Serrano is also called Calle Borges on some maps and street signs. Young people gather here late at night for impromptu singing and guitar sessions, often fueled by drinks at the many funky bars and restaurants around the plaza. A crafts festival runs on weekends, but you'll always find someone selling bohemian jewelry and leather goods, no matter the day. The neighborhood gained its name because many Argentine film studios were initially attracted to its once cheap rents, large studio spaces, and easy parking. Palermo Soho is better known for boutiques owned by local designers, with some restaurants and hotels mixed in. Palermo Soho is considerably quieter and less gentrified than Palermo Hollywood, which, in some ways, has become a victim of its own success, populated during the daytime by lost tourists with maps and guidebooks in hand.

Las Cañitas was once the favored location of the military powers during the dictatorship, and the area remains the safest and most secure of all of the central Buenos Aires neighborhoods. While the military powers no longer control the country, their training base, hospital, high school, and various family housing units still remain and encircle the neighborhood. Today the area is far better known among the hip, trendy, and nouveau riche as the place to dine out, have a drink and party, and be seen along the fashionable venues built into converted low-rise former houses on Calle Báez. Located near the polo grounds, it's a great place for enthusiasts to catch polo stars dining on the sidewalks in season. We place Las Cañitas into Palermo in this guidebook, though some refer to the area as a section of Belgrano or a location independent of any other neighborhood.

Recoleta

The city's most exclusive neighborhood, La Recoleta wears a distinctly European face. Tree-lined avenues lead past fashionable restaurants, cafes, boutiques, and galleries, many housed in French-style buildings. Much of the activity takes place along the pedestrian walkway Roberto M. Ortiz and in front of the Cultural Center and Recoleta Cemetery. This is a neighborhood of plazas and parks, where tourists and wealthy Argentines spend their leisure time outdoors. Weekends bring street performances, art exhibits, fairs, and informal sports, especially near the entrance to the cemetery.

The **Recoleta Cemetery** ★★★ (✆ **11/4804-7040** or 11/7803-1594), open daily from 8am to 6pm, pays tribute to some of Argentina's most important historical figures and gives its richest citizens one last chance to show off their wealth. The cemetery was once the garden of the adjoining church. Created in 1822, it's the city's oldest operating grave site—more of a necropolis, with tall mausoleums abutting, lining the paths that

run through the walled-in area. You can spend hours wandering the grounds, which cover 4 city blocks, adorned with works by local and international sculptors. More than 6,400 mausoleums form an architectural free-for-all, including Greek temples and pyramids. The most popular site is the tomb of Eva "Evita" Perón, which is always heaped with flowers and notes from adoring fans. To prevent her body from being stolen, as it had been many times, she is buried in a concrete vault 8.1m (27 ft.) underground. In spite of this, people peek through the glass doors and swear they see her. Many other rich or famous Argentines are buried here as well, including a number of Argentine presidents (many names on tombs correspond to names on city street signs).

Most tourists who come here visit only Evita's tomb and leave, but among the many tombs, two are worth singling out and should not be missed while exploring here. One is the tomb of the Paz family, who owned the newspaper *La Prensa,* as well as the palatial building on Plaza San Martín now known as the Círculo Militar. It is an enormous black stone structure covered with numerous white marble angels in turn-of-the-20th-century dress. The angels seem almost to soar to the heavens, lifting up the spirit of those inside with their massive wings. The sculptures were all made in Paris and shipped here. Masonic symbols such as anchors and pyramid-like shapes adorn this as well as many other Recoleta tombs.

Another tomb I recommend seeing while here is that of Rufina Cambaceres, a young woman who was buried alive in the early 1900s. She had perhaps suffered a coma, and a few days after her interment, workers heard screams from the tomb. Once the tomb was opened, there were scratches on her face and on the coffin from trying to escape. Her mother then built this Art Nouveau masterpiece, which has become a symbol of the cemetery. Her coffin is a Carrara marble slab, carved with a rose on top, and it sits behind a glass wall, as if her mother wanted to make up for her mistake in burying her and make sure to see her coffin if she were ever to come back again. Adorned by a young girl carved of marble who turns her head to those watching her, she looks as if she is about to break into tears, and her right hand is on the door of her own tomb.

The dead are not the only residents of the cemetery—about 86 cats roam among the tombs. The cats here are plumper than most strays, thanks to a few women from the area who come to feed them at 10am and 4pm. The cats gather in anticipation at the entrance, and this is a good time to bring children who might otherwise be bored in the cemetery. Weather permitting, free English guided tours take place every Tuesday and Thursday at 11am from the cemetery's Doric-columned entrance at Calle Junín 1790.

Adjacent to the cemetery, the **Centro Cultural Recoleta** ★ (p. 145) holds permanent and touring art exhibits along with theatrical and musical performances. Designed in the mid–18th century as a Franciscan convent, it was reincarnated as a poorhouse in 1858, serving that function until it became a cultural center in 1979. The first floor houses an interactive children's science museum, where it is "forbidden not to touch." Next door, Buenos Aires Design Center features shops specializing in home decor.

Plaza de Mayo

Juan de Garay founded the historic core of Buenos Aires, the Plaza de Mayo, in 1580. The plaza's prominent buildings create an architectural timeline: The Cabildo, Pirámide de Mayo (Pyramid of May), and Metropolitan Cathedral are vestiges of the colonial period (18th and early 19th c.), while the seats of national and local government reflect the styles of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the center of the plaza, you'll find palm trees, fountains, and benches. Plaza de Mayo remains the political heart of the city and as such, serves as a forum for protests. In recent years which have seen considerable

political and economic turmoil, barriers and a strong police presence have become a fact of life here, making it unpleasant at times. A planned revamp of the park, intended for the 2010 Bicentennial, though largely meant to stop demonstrations from gathering, would remove the benches and further prevent pedestrian flow, making it an even more unpleasant place, but the city has yet to act on the renovation. The mothers of the *desaparecidos,* victims of the military dictatorship's war against leftists, have demonstrated here since 1976. You can see them march, speak, and set up information booths Thursday afternoons at 3:30pm. The circle of headscarves, known as *pañuelos,* which surrounds the Pirámide de Mayo marks their demonstration route. The use of the headscarves as a symbol dates from a time when the military finally granted the mothers the right to march in protest, but forbid them speaking to anyone. They wrote the names of their missing children on the scarves, with the hope that someone would see and later, in a safer space, tell them what had happened to their children.

The Argentine president, whose residence is now in Los Olivos, in the suburbs, goes to work at the **Casa Rosada (Pink House)** ★★★. It is from a balcony of this building that Eva Perón addressed adoring crowds of Argentine workers, and former President Carlos Menem allowed Madonna to use it for the 1996 movie. Now, however, many Argentines associate the balcony with military dictator Leopoldo Galtieri's ill-fated declaration of war against the United Kingdom over the Falkland Islands, known here as the Islas Malvinas. You can watch the changing of the guard in front of the palace every hour on the hour. On a side entrance to the building is the **Presidential Museum** (✆ **11/4344-3802**), with information on the history of the building and items owned by various presidents over the centuries. It's open Monday through Friday from 10am to 6pm; admission is free.

The original structure of the **Metropolitan Cathedral** ★★ (✆ **11/4331-2845**) was built in 1745; it was given a new facade with carvings that tell the story of Jacob and his son Joseph, and was designated a cathedral in 1836. Inside lies a mausoleum containing the remains of Gen. José de San Martín, the South American liberator regarded as the "Father of the Nation." (San Martín fought successfully for freedom in Argentina, Peru, and Chile.) His body was moved here in 1880 to become a symbol of Argentina's unification and rise to greatness when Buenos Aires became the capital of the country at the end of a civil war. The tomb of the unknown soldier of Argentine independence is also here.

The **Cabildo** ★, Bolívar 65 (✆ **11/4334-1782**), was the original seat of city government established by the Spaniards. Completed in 1751, the colonial building proved significant in the events leading up to Argentina's declaration of independence from Spain in May 1810. Parts of the Cabildo were demolished to create space for Avenida de Mayo and Diagonal Sur. The remainder of the building was restored in 1939 and is worth a visit. The small informal museum offers paintings and furniture from the colonial period, and its ledges and windows offer some of the best views of the Plaza de Mayo and the opportunity to imagine what the area might have been like in the colonial period (the museum is open to the public Tues–Fri 12:30–7pm and Sun 2–6pm; admission is $1/70p). The Cabildo is the only remaining public secular building dating back to colonial times. On Thursday and Friday, the Cabildo's back patio is home to a crafts fair (11am–6pm).

A striking neoclassical facade covers the **Legislatura de la Ciudad (City Legislature Building),** at Calle Perú and Hipólito Yrigoyen, which houses exhibitions in several of its halls. Ask about tours, offered on an informal basis in English or Spanish. Legend has it that the watchtower was made so high so that the city could keep on eye on the nearby

president in the Casa Rosada. In front of the Legislatura, you'll see a bronze statue of Julio A. Roca. He is considered one of Argentina's greatest presidents and generals, but one of his legacies is slaughtering tens of thousands of Indians in the name of racial purity within the province. He is why Argentina, unlike most of Latin America, is a largely white society rather than mestizo, at least within Buenos Aires and the surroundings.

Farther down Calle Perú are the **Manzanas de las Luces (Blocks of Lights)** ★★, Calle Perú 272, which served as the intellectual center of the city in the 17th and 18th centuries. This land was granted in 1616 to the Jesuits, who built **San Ignacio**—the city's oldest church—still standing at the corner of calles Bolívar and Aslina. San Ignacio has a beautiful altar carved in wood with baroque details. It has been recently renovated after years of neglect and was nearly destroyed in the revolution that took Perón out of power in 1955, after he sought to reduce the power of the Catholic Church. The **Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires (National High School of Buenos Aires)** is also located here. Argentina's best-known intellectuals have gathered and studied here. The name "block of lights" recognizes the contributions of the National School's graduates, especially in achieving Argentina's independence in the 19th century. Tours, usually led on Saturday and Sunday at 3 and 4:30pm, include a visit to the Jesuits' system of underground tunnels, which connected their churches to strategic spots in the city (admission $2/£1.35). Speculation remains as to whether the tunnels also served a colonial military purpose or funneled pirated goods into the city to avoid taxes under the Spanish, and their full extent is still unknown. Perón and subsequent military regimes had also secretly expanded them. *Ratearse,* the Argentine slang for playing hooky, which literally means becoming a rat, comes from the tunnels, as this is where students hid to skip class. In addition to weekend tours, the Comisión Nacional de la Manzana de las Luces organizes a variety of cultural activities during the week, including folkloric dance lessons, open-air theater performances, art expositions, and music concerts. Call ✆ **11/4331-9534** for information.

Puerto Madero

Puerto Madero became Buenos Aires's second major gateway to trade with Europe when it was built in 1880, replacing in importance the port at La Boca. By 1910, the city had already outgrown it. The Puerto Nuevo (New Port) was established to the north to accommodate growing commercial activity, and Madero was abandoned for almost a century. Urban renewal saved the original port in the 1990s with the construction of a riverfront promenade, apartments, and offices. Bustling and businesslike during the day, the area attracts a fashionable, wealthy crowd at night. It's lined with elegant restaurants serving Argentine steaks and fresh seafood specialties, and there is a popular cinema showing Argentine and Hollywood films, as well as dance clubs such as **Asia de Cuba.** The entire area is rapidly expanding, with high-rise luxury residences making this a newly fashionable, if somewhat isolated and artificial, neighborhood to live in. Note that all the streets in Puerto Madero are named for important women in Argentine history. Look for the Buenos Aires City Tourism brochure "Women of Buenos Aires" to learn more about some of them. A plaque also exists on Avenida Alicia Moreau de Justo at Boulevard Villaflor, between Diques 3 and 2, with brief biographies. At sunset, take a walk along the eastern, modern part of the renovated area, and watch the water shimmer in brilliant reds as the city skyline and older portions of the port form a dramatic, silhouetted backdrop.

As you walk out from the port, you'll also come across the **Ecological Preserve** ★★. This area is an anomaly for a modern city and exists as proof that nature can regenerate from an ecological disaster. In the 1960s and 1970s, demolished buildings and debris

were dumped into the Río de la Plata after the construction of the *autopista,* or highway system. Over time, sand and sediment began to build up , plants and grasses gr ew, and birds now use it as a br eeding ground. Ask trav el agents about bir d-watching tours. I n the summer, adventurous Porteños use it as a beach, but the water is too polluted to swim in and you must be car eful of jagged debris and the homeless who set up camp her e. In spite of official legal pr otections, Puerto Madero development is slowly creeping onto the preserve. While the Ecological Preserve forms a sort of lung for the city, the height of the buildings in Puerto Madero has been blamed for blocking Río de la P lata winds, further decreasing air quality in downtown Buenos Aires.

Plaza San Martín ★★★ & the MicroCentro

Plaza San Martín, a beautiful par k at the base of Calle F lorida in the R etiro neighborhood, acts as the nucleus of what 's called the city 's M icroCentro. I n summer months, Argentine businesspersons flock to the par k on their lunch hour , loosening their ties, taking off some layers, and sunning for a while amid the plaza's flowering jacaranda trees. A monument to G en. José de San Martín towers over the scene. The park is busy at all hours; even after midnight, the playgr ound will be teeming with kids and their par ents out for a late-night stroll. Plaza San Martín was once the location of choice for the most elite families at the beginning of the 20th centur y. The San Martín Palace, now used by the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Círculo Militar, once the home of the Paz family who o wn the *La Prensa* ne wspaper; and the elegant P laza H otel testify to this former grandeur. The constr uction of the modern American E xpress building unfor tunately destroyed this once completely classical ar ea. Temporary art exhibits, usually with a social purpose, often occur within the Plaza, forcing you to stroll and take in each image and think as you consider their connections. The Plaza was also r ecently renovated with improved sidewalks and paving, as w ell as brighter lighting.

Plaza San Martín cascades do wn a hill, at the base of which sits the **Islas Malvinas War Memorial,** a stark circular wall engraved with the names of the nearly 750 dead and an eternal flame, o verseen b y guar ds fr om the v arious branches of the militar y. The memorial dir ectly faces the E lizabethan-style **British Clock Tower,** since r enamed the **Torre Monumental,** though most locals still use the old name. I t was a gift fr om the British, who built and ran the nearb y Retiro train station complex. O ddly, it r emained unscathed during the war but was attacked b y a mob y ears later, which also toppled an accompanying statue of G eorge Canning, the B ritish for eign secr etary who r ecognized Argentina's independence fr om Spain. The tower is open to the public and pr ovides a view of the city and riv er.

Calle Florida ★★★ is the city's main pedestrian thoroughfare and a shopper's paradise. The busiest section, extending south from Plaza San Martín to Avenida Corrientes, is lined with boutiques, r estaurants, and r ecord stor es. I t extends all the way thr ough Avenida de Mayo to the south, forming into **Calle Perú,** where many international banks have r etail branches. D ay and night, str eet per formers walk on glass, tango, and offer comedy acts. Take care when watching the performers to keep an eye out for pickpockets who work the mesmerized crowds. You'll find the upscale Galerías Pacífico fashion center here, where it intersects Calle Viamonte (see "Shopping," below). Most of the shopping on the str eet itself, ho wever, is middle-of-the-r oad, as upper-end r etailers hav e mo ved into malls and other par ts of the city. Leather stores however abound, so compare prices and bargain b y stopping into a fe w before finalizing your purchase. Many can also custom-make a special order in a day or two if you can't find exactly what you want. Florida

intersects with **Calle Lavalle,** a smaller version of itself. You'll find even more stores, most of lesser quality, and some inexpensive *parrillas* worth visiting. The street is also home to numerous movie theaters and video and electronic game arcades, so it's a good place for teenagers to hang out while you shop around. The city is currently pedestrianizing other streets within the MicroCentro, such as the recently completed Tres Sargentos. As of this writing, Reconquista, which parallels Florida, is being pedestrianized as well and will connect with Lavalle.

Avenida Corrientes ★ is a living diary of Buenos Aires's cultural development. Until the 1930s, Avenida Corrientes was the favored hangout of tango legends. When the avenue was widened in the mid-1930s, it made its debut as the Argentine Broadway, and Evita's first apartment was here as she struggled to make herself famous. Today Corrientes, lined with Art Deco cinemas and theaters, pulses with cultural and commercial activity day and night. It is also home to many bookstores, from the chains that sell bestsellers and offer English-language guidebooks, to independent bargain outlets and rare booksellers. The **Obelisco,** opened in 1936 as Buenos Aires's defining monument to mark the 400th anniversary of the first (unsuccessful) founding of the city, marks the intersection of Corrientes with **Avenida 9 de Julio.** Whenever locals have something to celebrate, they gather here. It's exciting to come here when Argentina wins an international soccer match.

MUSEUMS

Note that several of these museums are in Recoleta, which has no metro stations.

El Museo Histórico Nacional (National History Museum) ★★ Argentine history from the 16th through the 19th centuries comes to life in the former Lezama family home. The expansive Italian-style mansion houses 30 rooms with items saved from Jesuit missions, paintings illustrating clashes between the Spaniards and Indians, and relics from the War of Independence against Spain. The focal point of the museum's collection is artist Cándido López's series of captivating scenes of the war against Paraguay in the 1870s.

Calle Defensa 1600 (at Caseros). ✆ **11/4307-1182.** Free admission. Tues–Sun noon–6pm. Closed Jan. Metro: Constitución.

Malba-Colección Constantini ★★★ The airy and luminescent Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (Malba) houses the private art collection of Eduardo Costantini, a wealthy Argentine real estate developer. One of the most impressive collections of Latin American art anywhere, its temporary and permanent exhibitions showcase names such as Antonio Berni, Pedro Figari, Frida Kahlo, Cândido Portinari, Diego Rivera, and Antonio Siguí. Many of the works confront social issues and explore questions of national identity. Even the benches are modern pieces of art, and the enormous atrium offers access to the various floors under a metal sculpture of a man doing pushups over the escalator bay. This wonderful museum, which opened in late 2001, is located in Palermo Chico.

Av. Figueroa Alcorta 3415 (at San Martín de Tours). ✆ **11/4808-6500.** www.malba.org.ar. Admission $1.75 (£1.20). Free admission Wed. Wed–Mon noon–8pm. No metro access.

Museo Evita ★★★ It is almost impossible for non-Argentines to fathom that it took 50 years from the time of her death for Evita, the world's most famous Argentine, to finally get a museum. The Museo Evita opened July 26, 2002, in a mansion where her charity, the Eva Perón Foundation, once housed single mothers with children. While the

museum treats her history fairly, looking at both the good and the bad, it is obvious that love is behind the presentation. Indeed, Evita's grandniece Cristina Alvarez Rodríguez is often in the building meeting with the staff The museum, designed and curated by Gabriel Miremont, divides Evita's life into several parts, looking at her childhood; her arrival in Buenos Aires to become an actress; her assumption as Evita, first lady and unofficial saint to millions; and finally her death and legacy. You will be able to view her clothes, remarkably preserved by the military government, which took power after Perón. Other artifacts of her life include her voting card—significant because only through Evita did Argentine women gain the right to vote. There are also toys and schoolbooks adorned with her image, given to children to indoctrinate them with the Peronist ideology. The most touching artifact of all is a smashed statue of Evita, hidden for decades by a farmer in his barn, despite the possibility of his being jailed for housing it. Scholars of Argentine history should note that one of the largest collections of literature related to the Peróns is in the building, but you will need special permission to visit this section. Whether you hate, love, or remain indifferent to Evita, you shouldn't miss this museum; digesting the exhibitions will help you understand why she remains such a controversial figure within the Argentine psyche.

Calle Lafinur 2988 (at Gutiérrez). ✆ **11/4807-9433.** www.evitaperon.org. Admission $2 (£1.35). Tues–Sun 2–7:30pm. Metro: Plaza Italia.

Museo Nacional de Arte Decorativo (National Museum of Decorative Art) ★ French architect Rene Sergent, who designed some of the grandest mansions in Buenos Aires, envisioned and developed this museum. The building's 18th-century French design provides a classical setting for the diverse decorative styles represented within. Breathtaking sculptures, paintings, and furnishings round out the collection, and themed shows rotate seasonally. The **Museo de Arte Oriental (Museum of Eastern Art)** displays art, pottery, and engravings on the first floor of the building. The building is itself a work of art and gives an idea of the incredible mansions that once lined the avenue, overlooking the extensive Palermo park system.

Av. del Libertador 1902 (at Bustamante). ✆ **11/4801-8248.** Admission $1 (70p). Mon–Fri 2–8pm; Sat–Sun 11am–7pm. No metro access.

Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Museum of Fine Arts) ★★ This building, which formerly pumped the city's water supply, metamorphosed into Buenos Aires's most important art museum in 1930. The museum contains the world's largest collection of Argentine sculptures and paintings from the 19th and 20th centuries. It also houses European art dating from the pre-Renaissance period to the present day. The collections include notable pieces by Renoir, Monet, Rodin, Toulouse-Lautrec, and van Gogh, as well as a surprisingly extensive collection of Picasso drawings.

Av. del Libertador 1473 (at Pueyrredón). ✆ **11/4803-0802.** Free admission. Tues–Sun 12:30–7:30pm. No metro access.

OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Basílica y Convento de San Francisco (San Francisco's Church and Convent) ★ The San Roque parish is one of the oldest in the city. A Jesuit architect designed the church in 1730, but a final reconstruction in the early 20th century added a German baroque facade, along with statues of Saint Francis of Assisi, Dante, and Christopher Columbus. Inside you'll find a tapestry by Argentine artist Horacio Butler, along with an extensive library.

Calle Defensa and Alsina. ✆ **11/4331-0625.** Free admission. Hours vary. Metro: Plaza de Mayo.

Biblioteca Nacional (National Library) ★ Opened in 1992, this modern architectural oddity stands on the land of the former Presidential Residence in which Eva Perón died. With its underground levels, the library's 13 floors can store up to five million volumes. Among its collection, the library stores 21 books printed by one of the earliest printing presses, dating from 1440 to 1500. Visit the reading room—occupying two stories at the top of the building—to enjoy an awe-inspiring view of the city. The library also hosts special events in its exhibition hall and auditorium.

Calle Agüero 2502 (at Libertador). ✆ **11/4807-0885.** Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–9pm; Sat–Sun noon–8pm. No metro access.

Congreso (Congress) ★ The National Congress towers over Avenida de Mayo, forming the end of the Avenida de Mayo processional route, which begins at the presidents's Casa Rosada down the street. The capitol building, built in 1906, combines elements of classical Greek and Roman architecture, topped with an immense central dome modeled after its counterpart in Washington, D.C. Today the building cannot accommodate the entire congressional staff, some of whom had to spill over into neighboring structures. There are daily tours, in English and Spanish, but they are sometimes canceled if there are intense congressional sessions and other activities.

Plaza Congreso was designed in 1910 to frame the congress building and memorialize the centennial of a revolutionary junta that helped overthrow Spanish rule in Argentina. Stroll around the square and its surroundings to see a number of architectural landmarks, theaters, sidewalk cafes, and bars.

Plaza Congreso. Free hourly tours daily 11am–4pm. Metro: Congreso.

Teatro Colón (Colón Theater) ★★★ Moments Buenos Aires's golden age of prosperity gave birth to this luxurious opera house. It's one of the crowning visual delights of Avenida 9 de Julio, though its true entrance faces a park on the opposite side of the building. Over the years, the theater has been graced by the likes of Enrico Caruso, Luciano Pavarotti, Julio Bocca, Maria Callas, Plácido Domingo, Arturo Toscanini, and Igor Stravinsky. Work began in 1889 and took close to 20 years to complete, largely because the first two architects died during the building process. The majestic building opened in 1908 and combines a variety of European styles, from the Ionic and Corinthian capitals and stained-glass pieces in the main entrance to the Italian-marble staircase and French furniture, chandeliers, and vases in the Golden Hall. In the main theater, which seats 3,000 in orchestra seats, stalls, boxes, and four rises, an enormous chandelier hangs from the domed ceiling painted by Raúl Soldi in 1966 during a previous renovation. The theater's acoustics are world-renowned. In addition to hosting visiting performers, the Colón has its own Philharmonic orchestra, choir, and ballet company. Opera and symphony seasons last from February to late December. Unfortunately, while the building represents the glory of Argentina's golden period, its current renovation represents everything that is wrong with Argentina today. A multimillion-dollar renovation was announced, with much fanfare, in 2004. The plan was to finish by May 25, 2008—its 100th anniversary—for a revival of *Aida,* the opera's first production. As of this writing, the building remains in scaffolding, unfinished, with its interior partly exposed to the elements because windows have been removed. Without pointing any fingers, somehow much of the money went missing and the building is nowhere near a state to function in any capacity. Rumor has it that some of the opera's extensive collection of props and outfits has also been pilfered. I have been told that work should be completed by 2010, according to a new schedule, but no work appears to be in progress at the time of this

writing. Hourly **guided tours,** currently suspended, would allow you to view the main theater, backstage, and costume and undergr ound stage-design workshops. These were run between 11am and 3pm w eekdays, and fr om 9am to noon S aturday. Call ✆ **11/4378-7130** for more information and to see if any tours will eventually take place, which depends on the pr ogress, if any, of the r enovation. The ticket office does r emain open; but per formances that would or dinarily take place her e ar e scatter ed in other v enues throughout the city. The website may provide more information in the future, but is itself not curr ently up-to-date. F or those who lo ve B uenos Air es, and lo ve opera, what has happened to Teatro Colón is a tragedy wor thy of a production itself.

Calle Libertad 621 (or Calle Toscanini 1180 at Tucaman). ✆ **11/4378-7132,** or 11/4378-7344 for the ticket office. www.teatrocolon.org.ar. Prior tour admission fee $2.50 (£1.70). Seating for events $2–$45 (£1.35–£30). Metro: Tribunales.

SPECTATOR SPORTS & OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

GOLF Argentina has more than 200 golf courses. Closest to downtown are **Cancha de Golf de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires,** Av. Torquist 1426 and Olleros (✆ **11/4772-7261**), 10 minutes fr om downtown with gr eat scener y and a 71-par course; and **Jockey Club Argentino,** Av. M árquez 1700 (✆ **11/4743-1001**), in S an I sidro, which offers two courses (71 and 72 par) designed b y Allister McKenzie.

HORSE RACING Throughout much of the 20th century, Argentina was famous for its thoroughbreds. I t continues to send priz e horses to competitions ar ound the world, although you can watch some of the best right her e in Buenos Aires. Races take place at two tracks: **Hipódromo de S an I sidro,** A v. M árquez 504 (✆ **11/4743-4010**), and **Hipódromo Argentino de P alermo,** Av. del Liber tador 4205 (✆ **11/4778-2839**), in Palermo. Check the *Buenos Aires Herald* for race information.

POLO Argentina has won mor e international polo tournaments than any other country, and the **Argentine Open Championship,** held late November through early December, is the world's most important polo event. Argentina has two seasons for polo: March through May and September through December, held at the **Campo Argentino de Polo,** Avenida del Liber tador and A venida D orrego (✆ **11/4576-5600**). Tickets can be purchased at the gate. Contact the **Asociación Argentina de P olo,** Hipólito Yrigoyen 636 (✆ **11/4331-4646** or 11/4342-8321), for information on polo schools and ev ents. **La Martina Polo Ranch** (✆ **11/4576-7997**), located 60km (37 miles) fr om Buenos Aires near the to wn of Vicente Casares, houses mor e than 80 polo horses, as w ell as a guesthouse with a swimming pool and tennis cour ts.

SOCCER One cannot discuss *fútbol* in Argentina without paying homage to D iego Armando Maradona, Argentina's most revered player and one of the sport's great (if fallen) players. Any sense of national unity dissolves when Argentines watch their favorite clubs—River Plate, Boca Juniors, Racing Club, Independiente, and San Lorenzo—battle on Sunday. Passion for soccer could not run hotter, and you can catch a game at the **Estadio Boca Juniors,** Brandsen 805 (✆ **11/4362-2260**), in San Telmo, followed by raucous street parties. Ticket prices start at $3 (£2) and can be pur chased in advance or at the gate.

5 SHOPPING

Porteños consider their city one of the fashion capitals of the world. Although the wealthiest Argentines still fly to Miami for their wardrobes, Buenos Aires boasts many of

the same upscale stores you would find in New York or Paris. Do not expect to find a city full of indigenous textiles and crafts, as you would elsewhere in Latin America; Hermès, Louis Vuitton, Versace, and Ralph Lauren are more on the mark in wealthy districts such as Recoleta or Palermo. Boutiques of local designers, especially in Palermo, are an excellent and unique choice, as well as the numerous leather goods stores throughout the city which offer some of the finest and most interesting products of this type in the world. Look for the **Mapas de Buenos Aires** shopping map series (www.mapasbsas.com) concentrating on different neighborhoods and shopping themes, as well as the **GO Palermo** (www.gopalermo.com.ar) shopping booklet at your hotel and tourism kiosks. The **Calle Florida Shopping Association** also puts out a shopping booklet (www.calleflorida street.com). **DeDios** has an excellent laminated shopping map if you're likely to abuse that and your credit cards, available at Buenos Aires bookstores and online at www.dediosonline.com and www.amazon.com.

STORE HOURS & SHIPPING

Most stores are open weekdays from 9am to 8pm and Saturday from 9am until midnight, with some still closing for a few hours in the afternoon. You might find some shops open Sunday along Avenida Santa Fe, but few will be open on Calle Florida. Shopping centers are open daily from 10am to 10pm. Some stores not catering to tourists will close after Christmas and in early January for their summer holidays.

Certain art and antiques dealers will crate and ship bulky objects for an additional fee; others will tell you it's no problem to take that new sculpture directly on the plane. If you don't want to take any chances, contact **UPS** (✆ **800/222-2877**) or **FedEx** (✆ **810/333-3339**). Various stores participate in a tax-refund program for purchases over 70 pesos. In such a case, ask for a special receipt, which can entitle you to a refund of the hefty 21% tax (IVA) when you leave the country.

GREAT SHOPPING AREAS

MICROCENTRO Calle Florida, the pedestrian walking street in the MicroCentro, is home to wall-to-wall shops from Plaza San Martín past Avenida Corrientes. The **Galerías Pacífico** mall is on Calle Florida 750 and Avenida Córdoba (✆ **11/4319-5100**), with a magnificent dome and stunning frescoes painted by local artists. Over 180 shops are open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 9pm and Sunday from noon to 9pm, with tango and folk-dancing shows held on Thursday at 8pm in the food court, which is great for a shopping break no matter the time of the day. As you approach Plaza San Martín from Calle Florida, you find a number of well-regarded shoe stores, jewelers, and shops selling leather goods.

RECOLETA Avenida Alvear is an elegant, Parisian-like strip of European boutiques and cafes. Start your walk from Plaza Francia across from Recoleta Cemetery and continue past the Alvear Palace Hotel to the French Embassy at Cerrito or Nueve de Julio for one exclusive shop after another, many in French-style mansions. Avenida Quintana provides a similar atmosphere. **Patio Bullrich,** Av. del Libertador 750 (✆ **11/4814-7400**), is one of the city's best malls. Its 69 elegant shops are open daily 10am to 9pm.

AVENIDA SANTA FE Popular with local shoppers, Avenida Santa Fe, in the Barrio Norte district, up through Palermo offers a wide selection of clothing stores at down-to-earth prices. You will also find bookstores, cafes, ice-cream shops, and cinemas. The **Alto Palermo Shopping Center,** Av. Santa Fe 3253 (✆ **11/5777-8000**), is another excellent shopping center, with 155 stores open daily from 10am to 10pm.

SHOPPING

Ashanti Leather **30**
Asunto Impreso **2**
Candido Silva **55**
Casa Lopez **29**
Clasica y Moderna **18**
Cosentino **44**
Cousiño Jewels **28**
Crand Cru **5**
El Ateneo (Grand Splendid) **13**
El Nochero **8**
Escada **10**
Galeria El Solar de French **55**
Galeria Promenade de Alvear **3**
Galeria Ruth Benzacar **31**
Galerias Pacifico **34**
Gloria Lopes Sauqué **4**
H. Stern **27**, **30**
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Pallarols **54**
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Rossi & Caruso **16**, **36**
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Winery **26**, **33**

NIGHTLIFE

Asia de Cuba **46**
Asociacion Argentina de Cultura Inglesa (British Arts Centre) **11**
Café Tortoni **47**
Central Tango **24**
Centro Cultural de Borges **35**
Centro Cultural Recoleta (Recoleta Cultural Center) **1**
Chandon Bar **38**
El Arranque **25**
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El Niño Bien **50**
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Mano a Mano at Plaza Bohemia **41**
Medio y Medio **49**
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Teatro Coliseo **17**
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Teatro Gran Rex **42**
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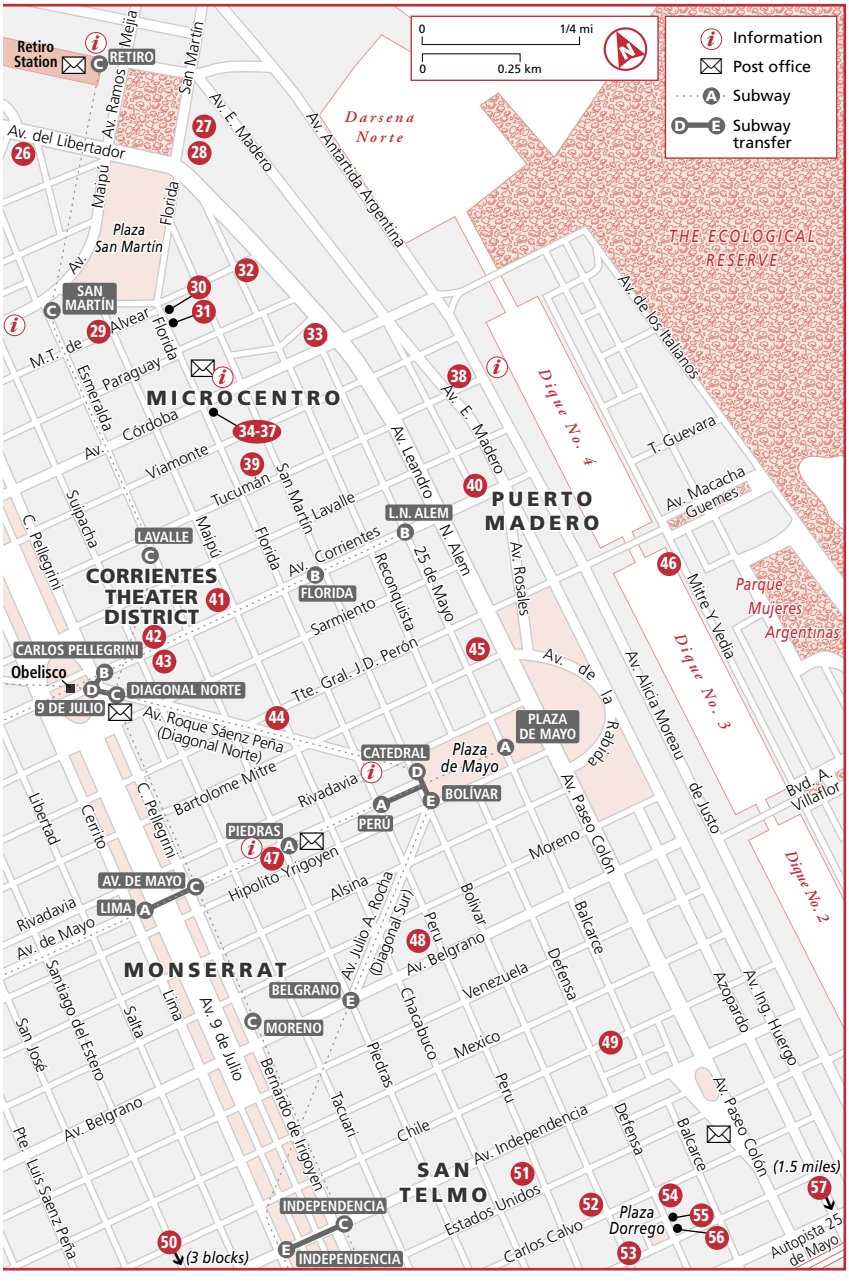
Teatro Presidente Alvear **22**
The Shamrock **12**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Av. Antartida Argentina
Darsena Norte
Av. del Libertador
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THE ECOLOGICAL RESERVE
Av. de los Italianos
SAN MARTÍN
Alvear
Florida
M.T. de Esmeralda
Paraguay
MICROCENTRO
Córdoba
Viamonte
Tucumán
San Martín
Lavalle
Av. Leandro N. Alem
Dique No. 4
T. Guevara
Av. Macacha Guemes
PUERTO MADERO
L.N. ALEM
LAVALLE
Suipacha
C. Pellegrini
Maipú
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Av. Corrientes
Reconquista
25 de Mayo
N. Alem
Av. Rosales
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FLORIDA
Sarmiento
Mitre Y Vedia
Parque Mujeres Argentinas
Dique No. 3
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Obelisco
DIAGONAL NORTE
9 DE JULIO
Av. Roque Sáenz Peña (Diagonal Norte)
Tte. Gral. J.D. Perón
Av. de la Rábida
Av. Alicia Moreau de Justo
PLAZA DE MAYO
CATEDRAL
Plaza de Mayo
Rivadavia
BOLÍVAR
PERÚ
Bartolome Mitre
C. Pellegrini
Libertad
Cerrito
PIEDRAS
Hipolito Yrigoyen
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Moreno
Bvd. A. Villaflor
Dique No. 2
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Rivadavia
Av. de Mayo
Alsina
Av. Julio A. Roca (Diagonal Sur)
Bolívar
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Balcarce
Defensa
Av. Belgrano
Venezuela
Av. Ing. Huergo
Azopardo
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BELGRANO
MORENO
Santiago del Estero
Salta
Lima
Av. 9 de Julio
San José
Chacabuco
Mexico
Piedras
Tacuari
Bernardo de Irigoyen
Pte. Luis Sáenz Peña
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SAN TELMO & LA BOCA These neighborhoods offer excellent antiques, artists' studios, and arts and crafts celebrating tango. Street performers and artists are omnipresent, especially on weekends when even locals come to be entertained. Avoid La Boca at night and be aware of pickpockets in both neighborhoods.

OUTDOOR MARKETS

The **Feria de San Telmo** ★★ (www.feriadesantelmo.com), which takes place every Sunday from 10am to 5pm at Plaza Dorrego, is a vibrant, colorful experience that will delight even the most jaded traveler and should absolutely not be missed. Even locals come here for bargains and fun; and during the summer, the event ends long after 5pm. As street vendors sell their heirlooms, singers and dancers move though the crowd to tango music. Among the 270-plus vendor stands, you will find antique silver objects, porcelain, crystal, and other antiques.

Plaza Serrano Fair is at the small plaza at the intersection of Calle Serrano (Calle Borges on some maps) and Honduras, which forms the heart of Palermo Soho and is also known as Plaza Julio Cortazar. Bohemian arts and crafts are sold here, while dread-headed locals sing and play guitars. Officially, it's held Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 6pm, but impromptu vendors set up at night, too, when the restaurants are crowded.

Recoleta Fair ★★, which takes place Saturday and Sunday in front of Recoleta Cemetery in Plaza Francia from 10am until sunset, offers every imaginable souvenir and craft, as well as food. This has become the city's largest fair, completely taking over all the walkways in the area—even the Iglesia Pilar gets involved with stands selling religious souvenirs. Live bands sometimes play on whatever part of the hill sloping down to Avenida Libertador is not taken over by vendors.

La Boca Fair is open daily from 10am to 6pm or sundown, and concentrates on El Caminito, the colorful pedestrian walkway that is the heart of the neighborhood. It's the most touristy of all the fairs, and most of the items are terribly overpriced. Still, if you need tacky souvenirs in a hurry, you can do all your shopping here. Besides, tango singers and other street performers will keep your mind off the inflated prices. When the vendors start leaving at the end of the day, you should, too, for safety reasons.

SHOPPING A TO Z

Almost all shops in Buenos Aires accept credit cards. However, you will often get a better price if you offer to pay with cash (including U.S. dollars, in certain cases). You won't be able to use credit cards at outdoor markets.

Antiques

Throughout the streets of San Telmo, you will find the city's best antiques shops; don't miss the antiques market that takes place all day Sunday at Plaza Dorrego (see "Outdoor Markets," above). A number of fine antiques stores are scattered along Avenida Alvear in Recoleta, including a collection of boutique shops at **Galería Alvear,** Av. Alvear 1777.

Tips Shopping Tip

Most antiques stores will come down 10% to 20% from the listed price if you try to bargain.

Galería El Solar de French Built in the early 20th century in a Spanish colonial style, this is where Argentine patriot Domingo French lived. Today it's a gallery, with antiques shops and photography stores depicting the San Telmo of yesteryear. Calle Defensa 1066, at Carlos Calvo. No phone. Metro: Constitución.

Pallarols Located in San Telmo, Pallarols sells an exquisite collection of Argentine silver and other antiques. You can watch as they make items to special order. Calle Defensa 1039, at Carlos Calvo. ✆ **11/4300-6555.** www.pallarols.com.ar. Metro: Constitución.

Art Galleries

Cándido Silva ★★★ Filled with antiques and religious objects, this store is a standout in the Galería El Solar de French. Objects come in a range of materials—from wood, to marble, to silver. Many items are centuries-old antiques. Others are tasteful and exquisite reproductions, including a wide selection of canvases painted by indigenous people from throughout South America: Renaissance portraiture comes together with Frida Kahlo's magical realism, in representations of saints, angels, Christ, and numerous renditions on the Virgin Mary. Rural silver and gaucho items are also part of the items on display. Don't worry about fitting it all on the plane—they ship around the world. Calle Defensa 1066 (at Humberto I, in Galería El Solar de French). ✆ **11/4361-5053** or 11/15-5733-0696 (cell). www.candidosilva.com.ar. Metro: Independencia.

Galería Ruth Benzacar This avant-garde gallery, in a hidden underground space at the start of Calle Florida, next to Plaza San Martín, hosts art exhibits of local and national interest. Among the best-known Argentines who have appeared here are Alfredo Prior, Miguel Angel Ríos, Daniel García, Graciela Hasper, and Pablo Siguier. Calle Florida 1000 (at Alvear). ✆ **11/4313-8480.** www.ruthbenzacar.com. Metro: San Martín.

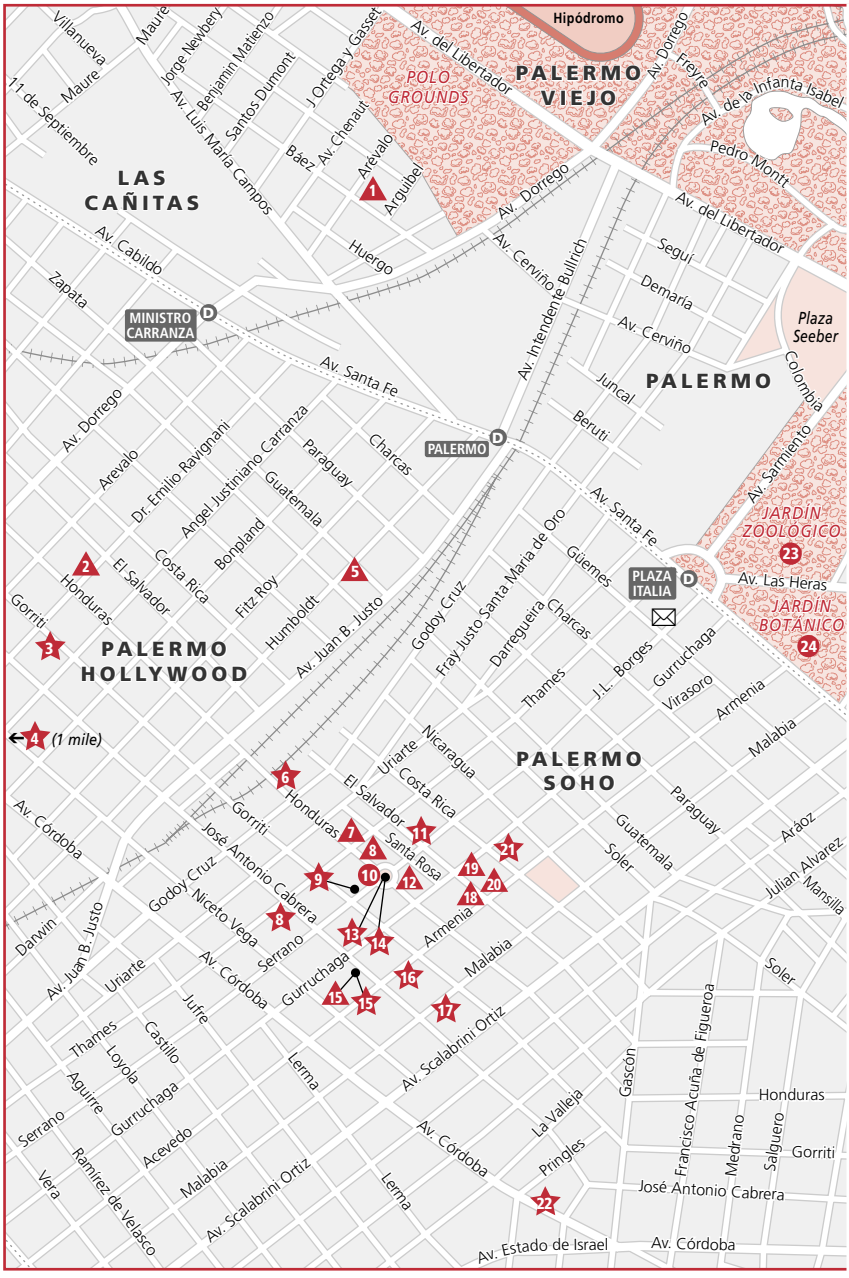
Bookstores & Stationery

Argentines love to read, and you shouldn't be surprised if you find yourself in literary discussions even with your taxi drivers. Bookstores abound all over the city, with a concentration of stores along Avenida Santa Fe, Calle Florida, and on Avenida Corrientes, west of Nueve de Julio. Many are chains with branches throughout the city. Unlike in North America and the United Kingdom, online bookselling has not made serious inroads on independent and used bookstores, so you'll be able to enjoy old-fashioned browsing and discovery.

Asunto Impreso ★★ Its location in the Centro Cultural Recoleta is one indication that this is a bookstore of distinction, and its tag line, "bookstore for the imagination," is another. You'll find very high quality educational and art books here, many of specific interest to the tourist looking to go a little deeper into the history and culture of Buenos Aires. Junín 1930, in Centro Cultural Recoleta. ✆ **11/4805-5585.** www.asuntoimpreso.com. No metro access.

El Ateneo (Grand Splendid) ★★ **Moments** This is one of Buenos Aires's most magnificent bookstores, for the selection, but most certainly for the location. It's built into a former turn-of-the-last-century theater and preserves the ornamentation, stage, and even the theater boxes which serve as reading cubbyholes. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 10pm, and Sunday from 10am to 9pm. Av. Santa Fe 1860, at Callao. ✆ **11/4813-6052.** www.elateneo.com. Metro: Callao.

Librerías Turísticas Every and any kind of tourism book on Argentina and other parts of the world can be found in this store. The company is itself a publisher and seller of books. Open Monday through Friday from 9am to 7pm, Saturday from 9am to 1pm.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PALERMO VIEJO
LAS CAÑITAS
PALERMO
PALERMO HOLLYWOOD
PALERMO SOHO
MINISTRO CARRANZA
PALERMO
PLAZA ITALIA
Plaza Seeber
JARDÍN ZOOLÓGICO
JARDÍN BOTÁNICO
Av. del Libertador
Av. Dorrego
Av. Cerviño
Av. Santa Fe
Av. Las Heras
Av. Córdoba
Av. Scalabrini Ortiz
Av. Estado de Israel
Av. Juan B. Justo
Av. Cabildo
Av. Luis María Campos
Av. Intendente Bullrich
Av. de la Infanta Isabel
Av. Sarmiento
Av. Freire
Pedro Moncayo
Villanueva
Maure
Jorge Newbery
Benjamin Matienzo
Santos Dumont
J. Ortega y Gasset
Báez
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Fitz Roy
Humboldt
Godoy Cruz
Fray Justo Santa María de Oro
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Güemes
Thames
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Vera
Gascón
Francisco Acuña de Figueroa
Medrano
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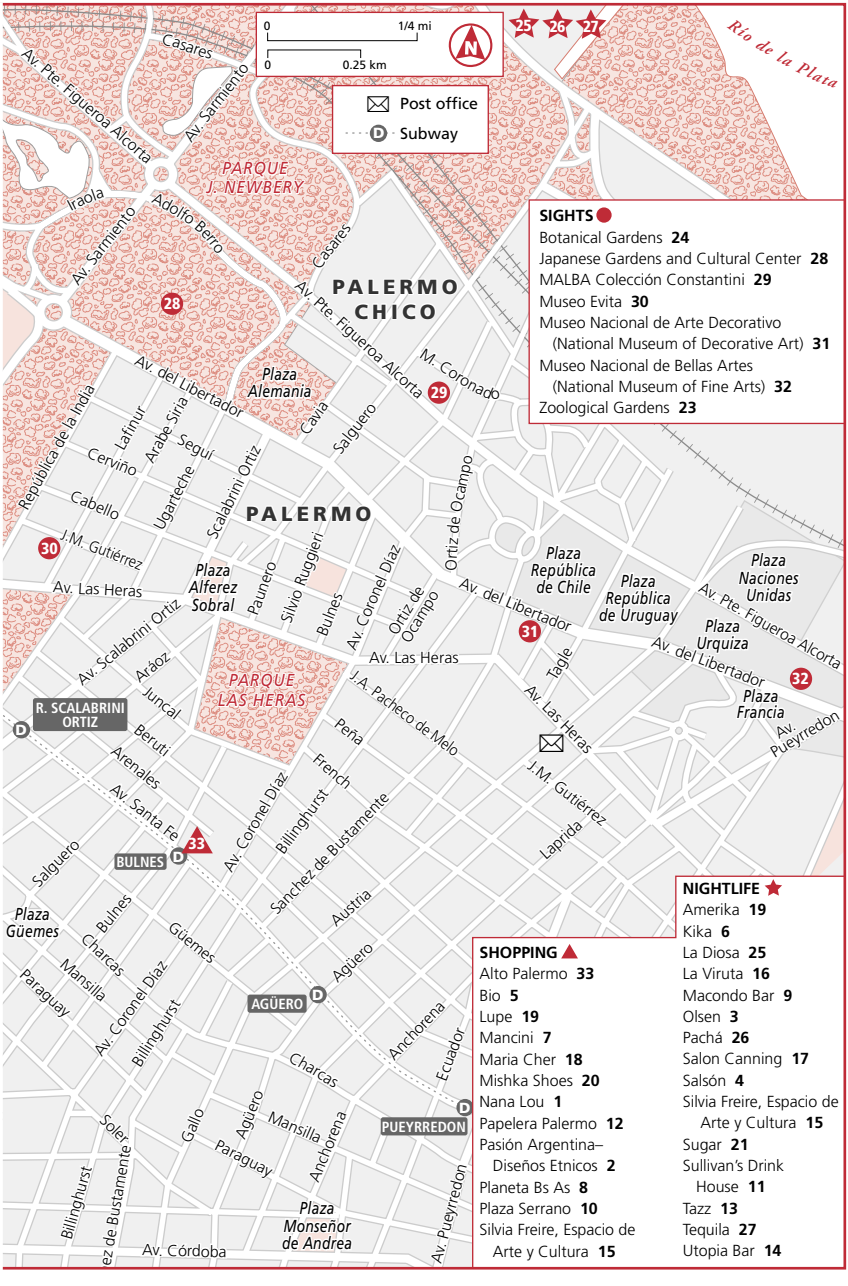

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 Paraguay 2457, at P ueyrredón. ✆ **11/4963-2866** or 11/4962-5547. w ww.libreriaturistica.com.ar. Metro: Pueyrredón.

Papelera P alermo ★ Finds If you're looking for an unusual " only in Argentina" gift, and beautiful paper to wrap it in, this is the place. You'll find small notebooks, bound in leather or with a handcrafted E vita or Che G uevara cover, to write down your thoughts on Buenos Aires. Artistic photo books and other unique leather office goods are also for sale, along with a large selection of colorful specialty papers and notecards. Open Monday to S aturday 10am to 8pm, S unday 2 to 8pm. Honduras 4945, at S errano. ✆ **11/4833-3081.** www.papelerapalermo.com.ar. No metro access.

Walrus B ooks This unique E nglish-language bookstor e was opened b y G eoffrey, an American who moved to Buenos Aires after falling in love and marrying Josefina, his Argentine wife. They stock thousands of used E nglish-language books, and many translations of historical South American texts and literature, as well as collections of new books and travel guides. If you're looking for something literary in English to read on the *subte* or the plane ride home, this is the place to stop into . Open Tuesday to S unday 10am to 8pm. Estados Unidos 617, at Peru. ✆ **11/4300-7135.** www.walrus-books.com.ar. Metro: Moreno.

Cameras & Accessories

Cosentino If you need something for your camera, are looking for a new one, or need high-quality developing services, Cosentino offers it all and can refer you for camera repairs. Av. Roque Sáenz Peña (Diagonal Norte) 738, at Perón. ✆ **11/4328-9120.** Metro: Catedral.

Fashion & Apparel

Palermo S oho is the place for boutiques sho wcasing both y oung and w ell-established designers, though prices are not the bargains they once w ere here. Women's fashion as a whole is flirty, fun, and, above all, feminine, made for a thin figure. Men's clothing tends toward the conservative, if not drab , in Argentina, but w e list a few fashionable choices too. You will find the city 's top international fashion stor es along A venida Alvear and Calle Quintana in Recoleta.

Escada This boutique shop sells casual and elegant selections of women 's clothing, combining quality and comfort. Av. Alvear 1516 (at Parera). ✆ **11/4815-0353.** No metro access.

Florentina Muraña ★★ Finds This wonderful little store in Palermo Soho takes its name fr om a character in a Borges stor y that took place in P alermo. You'll find v ery pretty, feminine clothing made of interesting materials here. Some examples of the offerings include popcorn shag sw eaters, handmade in Argentina fr om Italian wool, cr ystal jewelry, and an extensiv e collection of leather clothing and accessories. The o wner is Gabriela Sivori; she works in the shop and designs some of the items for sale, all of which are made solely in Argentina. Open daily from 11:30am to 8pm, though hours fluctuate in the summer. Calle Borges 1760, at P asaje Russel. ✆ **11/4833-4137.** www.florentinamurania.com.ar. No metro access.

Francisco Casabal Designs Native Argentine Francisco Casabal, who lives in both Buenos Aires and Dallas, Texas, is inspired by his country, whether gaucho culture, native Indian designs, or the love of summer. He uses leather, natural fabrics, and other materials in his creations for men and women. Showing by appointment only. ✆ **11/15-6926-6846** (cell). www.casabal.com. No metro access.

Lupe ★★ Finds Designer G uadalupe Villar opened this white, air y, and always busy store in 2004. H er designs ar e young and feminine, with an emphasis on casual

sportswear at reasonable prices. Open Monday to Saturday from 11am to 8:30pm and Sunday 3 to 8pm, though hours will vary in summer. El Salvador 4657, at Armenia. ✆ **11/4833-0730.** www.lupeba.com.ar. No metro access.

Mancini ★★ Finds While women can shop 'til they drop with the mind-boggling number of choices in Buenos Aires, most clothing stores in Argentina tend to have a limited selection of interesting men's clothing. Mancini, a chain with men's and women's clothing, is an exception to the rule. This branch, in Palermo Viejo, offers chic clothing, with an emphasis on black. Either because they are unfriendly or simply jaded, the staff generally leaves shoppers in this store on their own, not following them around as in other stores in the city. Open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 8:30pm, Sunday 11am to 7pm. Honduras 5140, btw. Thames and Uriarte. ✆ **11/4832-7570.** No metro access.

Maria Cher ★ This boutique is a work of art in itself, with its glass-and-steel construction and its own interior bamboo garden. Maria Chernajovky's store has an emphasis on dresses and leather coats and other leather clothing. It's a perfect spot for a woman looking for mature, fashionable clothing with a more sophisticated air. Open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 8pm, and Sunday 2pm to 7:30pm, though hours will vary in summer. El Salvador 4724, at Armenia. ✆ **11/4833-4736.** www.maria-cher.com.ar. No metro access.

Mishka Shoes ★★ Finds If you're a woman with a shoe fetish, head to this small boutique in Palermo Soho. It's not cheap by any means—prices range up to $500 (£338) for Swarovski Crystal beaded sandals and other unique handmade footwear—but it's definitely a place to splurge. All the shoes are made in Argentina, and custom-made sizes and details can also be arranged. If your spouse or partner gets bored, make him wait on the long white settee, while you drool over the selection. Open Monday to Saturday from 11am to 8:30pm. El Salvador 4673, at Armenia. ✆ **11/4833-6566.** www.mishkashoes.com. No metro access.

Nana Lou ★ Finds Mariana Lopez Osornio owns this small boutique in the Las Cañitas area of Palermo for which she has designed much of the clothing. Pretty and feminine is the rule here, and many designs also come from Italy. Jewelry is also part of the offerings. Open late, this is a good shopping option if you happen to be dining on Calle Báez, which is much better known for its restaurants than its stores. Open Sunday through Friday from noon to 1am, Saturday from noon to 2am. Calle Báez 283, at Arévalo. ✆ **11/4772-7826.** www.mlo.com.ar. Metro: Carranza.

Planeta Bs As ★★ More a collection of stores than one store, Planeta Bs As was started by fashion journalist Claudia Jara. Young designers she interviewed after the peso crisis kept asking her how they can show their designs when they had no money to open a boutique. Claudia answered their questions by opening this space. You'll find maybe 50 vendors offering clothes, primarily for women, with a few men's items thrown in too. Hours and selection, of course, will vary by designer. Nearby, Claudia also opened **Diseño Bs As,** at Jorge Luis Borges 1613, and **Diseño Arg,** at Honduras 5033, each off Plaza Serrano. Open Tuesday through Friday from 3 to 9pm, and Saturday and Sunday 2 to 9pm. Jorge Luis Borges 1627, at Plaza Serrano. ✆ **11/4832-2006.** www.mujermilenio.com.ar and www.vol.com.ar. No metro access.

Polo Ralph Lauren This is the Buenos Aires branch of the famous American luxury retailer. You will find slightly lower prices here than in North America or Europe. The building, an old turn-of-the-20th-century Art Nouveau mansion, is also a reason to come shopping here: The ornate wooden trim and balustrades remain, and a stained-glass

 skylight oversees the whole shop. Open Monday to Saturday 10am to 8pm. Av. Alvear 1780, at Callao. ✆ **11/4812-3400.** No metro access.

Jewelry

The city's finest jewelry stores are in Recoleta and inside many five-star hotels. You can find bargains on gold along Calle Libertad, near Avenida Corrientes.

Cousiño Jewels Located along the Sheraton hotel's shopping arcade, this Argentine jeweler features a brilliant collection of art made of the national stone, the rhodochrosite, or Inca Rose. In the Sheraton Buenos Aires Hotel, Av. San Martín. ✆ **11/4318-9000.** Metro: Retiro.

H.Stern This upscale Brazilian jeweler, with branches in major cities around the world, sells an entire selection of South American stones, including emeralds and the unique imperial topaz. It's the top jeweler in Latin America. Branches in the Marriott Plaza (✆ **11/4318-3083**) and the Sheraton (✆ **11/4312-6762**). No metro access.

Leather

With all that beef in its restaurants, Argentina could not be anything but one of the world's best leather centers. If you're looking for high-quality, interestingly designed leather goods, especially women's shoes, accessories, and handbags, few places beat Buenos Aires's selection. Many leather stores will also custom-make jackets and other items for interested customers, so do ask if you see something you like in the wrong size or want to combine ideas from pieces. Most can do this in a day or two, but if you are intent on bringing something home from Argentina, you should start checking out stores and prices early on in your trip. Some stores take a week for custom orders, and if something is complicated to make, it might take even longer.

Ashanti Leather Factory ★ This small store on Calle Florida offers a wide selection of leather goods, from men's and women's jackets to funky and interesting women's pocketbooks. Their prices on jackets are not the best, but women's accessories are very competitively priced, and you can always bargain. Best of all, their factory is in the basement of the shop, so they can easily custom-make almost anything for you. Ask them for a tour, through which you can meet the craftspeople Roberto, Victor, and Oscar, who sit surrounded by sewing machines and colorful bolts of leather. Open daily from 10am to 10pm. Calle Florida 585 (at Lavalle). ✆ **11/4394-1310.** Metro: San Martín.

Casa López ★★ Widely considered among the best *marroquinería* (leather-goods shop) in Buenos Aires, Casa López sells an extensive range of Argentine leather products. There is also a shop in the Patio Bullrich Mall. Open Monday to Saturday 10am to 2pm and Monday to Friday 3 to 7pm. Marcelo T. de Alvear 640, at Maipú (near Plaza San Martín). ✆ **11/4312-8911.** Metro: San Martín.

Chabeli This store offers a wide selection of women's shoes and pocketbooks, and most things cost no more than $100 (£68). They also offer an interesting selection of handmade Argentine jewelry from crystals and semiprecious stones. Designs of leather accessories and jewelry fall into two main categories: native Argentine and very pretty and feminine, with pink and pastel materials. They also have another branch in the Patagonian resort town of Bariloche. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 8pm, and Sunday from noon to 7pm. Calle Florida 702. ✆ **11/4328-0805.** Metro: San Martín.

El Nochero All the products sold at El Nochero are made with first-rate Argentine leather and manufactured by local workers. Shoes and boots, leather goods and clothes,

Tips The Murillo Street Leather District

Looking to compare prices and selection in a hurry? Then head to the **Murillo Street Leather Warehouse** district in the Villa Crespo neighborhood. We've listed several individual stores in the area, including the large Murillo 666, one of the street's main outlets. Items are often made above the storefront, or in a factory nearby. Don't be afraid to bargain, or ask for custom orders if you don't find exactly what you like on the shop floor. The densest concentration of stores is on Murillo, between Malabia and Acevedo, but a total of about 50 stores fan out from there, selling everything from leather jackets to purses, luggage, furniture, and more. Many of the smaller stores are owned by Orthodox Jews, so will be closed on Friday evenings and Saturdays, as well as Jewish holidays, so take that into account when planning a visit.

and decorative silverware (including *mates,* for holding the special herbal tea Argentines love) fill the store. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 9pm, Sunday and holidays noon to 9pm. Posadas 1169 (in the Patio Bullrich Mall). ✆ **11/4815-3629.** No metro access.

Gloria Lopes Sauqué ★ Beautiful exclusive designs await you in this unique leather-design gallery. Gloria Lópes Sauqué is one of Argentina's most creative designers and exhibits her work in various countries. She is also the only Argentine designer whose work is sold in Galleries Lafayette in Paris. Open Monday through Friday from 10am to 8pm, Saturday 10am to 6pm. Posadas 1169 (btw. Libertad and Cerritos). ✆ **11/4815-3007.** www.glorialopezsauque.com. No metro access.

Murillo 666 ★★ This store is the main outlet in the Murillo Street Leather District in Villa Crespo neighborhood. They have a large selection of women's coats and accessories, and one of the largest assortments of men's jackets, which they will custom-make. They also have the largest furniture showroom as well. Unlike many stores in the district, they offer the same prices for cash or for credit, but sometimes you can still bargain a price down slightly. Open daily 9:30am to 8pm. Murillo 666 (btw. Malabia and Acevedo in Villa Crespo). ✆ **11/4856-4501.** www.murillo666.com.ar. Metro: Malabia.

Outlet ★ The name says it all for this store just off Murillo: This is definitely a place to bargain, and shopping with friends might save you even more money, because they offer group discounts. In addition to large selections of jackets, handbags, gloves, and other items, this store also carries a small selection of shoes. Those couches you're sitting on as your friends try everything on? You can buy those in various colors as well. There is also a small selection of women's fur coats here. Open Monday to Friday 10am to 7:30pm, and Saturday 10am to 6:30pm. Scalabrini Ortiz 5 (at Murillo, in Villa Crespo). ✆ **11/4857-1009.** Metro: Malabia.

Outlet de Cuero Smaller than some of the other stores, this shop still provides great service, though the selection is better for women than men. Items range from jackets to handbags. If you can't find what you want, this is a perfect place to ask about what can be made from their various leather swatches on hand. Open Monday to Saturday 9am to 8pm. Murillo 643 (btw. Malabia and Acevedo, in Villa Crespo). ✆ **11/4854-8436.** Metro: Malabia.

Paseo Del Cuero ★ Along with coats and the usual items for men and women, this factory outlet in the Murillo district also has a great selection of men's and women's small

luggage carry-ons and gym bags. Feel free to bargain, as the staff often gives you a slightly lower price if you hesitate or offer to pay in cash. Looking for cowhide throw rugs? They've got those too. Open Monday to Saturday 9:30am to 7:30pm. Murillo 624 (btw. Malabia and Acevedo, in Villa Crespo). ✆ **11/4855-9094.** www.paseodelcuero.com.ar. Metro: Malabia.

Pasión Argentina–Diseños Etnicos ★★ With chain stores overrunning Palermo Viejo, it's good to see this small independent shop thriving in the heart of it all. Owner Amadeo Bozzi concentrates on leather goods primarily for women, accessories for men and women, and the home. All produced in Argentina, they are well designed and well made. Some combine leather with other native materials made by members of the Wichi tribe, a native group in the Chaco region. I highly recommend a visit to this store if you're in Palermo Viejo. Open Monday through Friday from 10am to 6pm, and Saturday 10am to 2pm. Ravignani 1780 (btw. Honduras and El Salvador, in Palermo Viejo). ✆ **11/4773-1157** or 11/4777-7550. www.pasion-argentina.com.ar. Metro: Carranza.

Rossi & Caruso Offering some of the best leather products in the city, this store is the first choice for visiting celebrities—the king and queen of Spain and Prince Philip of England among them. Products include luggage, saddles, and accessories as well as leather and chamois clothes, purses, wallets, and belts. There is another branch in the Galerías Pacífico mall (p. 133). Open daily 9:30am to 8:30pm. Av. Santa Fe 1377 (at Uruguay). ✆ **11/4811-1965.** www.rossicaruso.com. Metro: Bulnes.

626 Cueros The blasting disco music here tells you you're in a place with a little edge compared to some of the other leather stores in the Murillo district. Here you'll find interestingly designed men's and women's coats, many slightly less expensive than in the other stores. You'll also pay less if you pay cash. Open Monday to Saturday 10am to 6pm. Murillo 626 (btw. Malabia and Acevedo, in Villa Crespo). ✆ **11/4857-6972.** Metro: Malabia.

Wine Shops

Argentine wineries, particularly those in Mendoza and Salta, produce some excellent wines. Stores selling Argentina wines abound, and among the best are **Grand Cru,** Av. Alvear 1718; **Tonel Privado,** in the Patio Bullrich Shopping Mall and in Galerías Pacífico; **Winery,** which has branches at L. N. Alem 880 and Av. Del Libertador 500, both downtown; and **Vinos Argentinos** at Tucumán 565 just off Calle Florida.

6 BUENOS AIRES AFTER DARK

From the Teatro Colón (Colón Theater) to dimly lit tango salons, Buenos Aires offers an exceptional variety of nightlife. Porteños eat late and play later: Theater performances start around 9pm, bars and nightclubs open around midnight, and no one shows up until after 1am. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday are the big going-out nights, with the bulk of activity in Recoleta, Palermo, and Costanera. Summer is quieter, because most of the town flees to the coast.

Performing arts in Buenos Aires are centered on the highly regarded Teatro Colón, home to the National Opera, National Symphony, and National Ballet. In addition, the city boasts nearly 40 professional theaters (many located along Av. Corrientes, btw. 9 de Julio and Callao, and in the San Telmo and Abasto neighborhoods) showing Broadway- and off-Broadway-style hits, Argentine plays, and music reviews, although most are in Spanish. Buy tickets for most productions at the box office or through **Ticketmaster**

(✆ **11/4321-9700**). The **British Arts Centre,** Suipacha 1333 (✆ **11/4393-0275**), runs productions in English.

For current information on after-dark entertainment, consult the *Buenos Aires Herald* (in English) or any of the major local publications. The *QuickGuide Buenos Aires* also has information on shows, theaters, and nightclubs.

THE PERFORMING ARTS

Theaters, Exhibitions & Other Venues

There is no shortage of exciting theater and art exhibitions in Buenos Aires. It's high quality, varied, and extremely inexpensive considering what you get. Check out the options below, or head to Corrientes, Buenos Aires's answer to Broadway, and look at whatever is currently running in town. Besides the offerings at the British Arts Centre, virtually everything will be in Spanish. We list some ticket prices in this section, particularly on the low end. However, for the larger theaters and for international stars, expect to pay prices only about 20% to 30% less than in North America or Europe. Many theaters close just before Christmas and early January, following the summer crowds to Mar del Plata, so check to see if a show you want to see is actually running. As in North America and Europe, Monday is usually the dark night in larger theaters, except on national holidays, when there are usually slightly early evening performances.

Asociación Argentina de Cultura Inglesa (British Arts Centre) ★★★ This multifunctional facility was established over 77 years ago by a British ambassador who wanted to do more to promote British culture within Argentina. He was highly successful in his efforts, and today the AACI teaches English to over 25,000 students a year; runs several film, theater, culture, and art programs; and generally provides a very welcoming environment for any English speaker who is homesick. Events can range from upper crust (Shakespeare) to raunchy (*Absolutely Fabulous* TV program showings). The center has a very limited summer schedule from January to March. You can pick up brochures and event listings at the center, or look up listings in the English-language *Buenos Aires Herald.* Suipacha 1333 (at Arroyo). ✆ **11/4393-2004.** www.aaci.org.ar and www.britishartscentre.org.ar. Tickets $2–$10 (£1.35–£6.80). Metro: San Martín.

Centro Cultural de Borges ★★ Not only can you shop all you want in Galerías Pacífico, but, if it's culture you're after, you can find that there too. The shopping mall houses this arts center named for Jorge Luis Borges, Argentina's most important literary figure. You'll find art galleries; lecture halls with various events; an art cinema; art bookstore; the **Escuela Argentina de Tango,** which offers a schedule of lessons tourists can take with ease (✆ **11/4312-4990;** www.eatango.org); and the ballet star **Julio Bocca's Ballet Argentino** performance space and training school, full of young ballet stars (see below). Enter through Galerías Pacífico or at the corner of Viamonte and San Martín. ✆ **11/5555-5359.** www.ccborges.com.ar. Ticket prices vary. Metro: San Martín.

Centro Cultural Recoleta (Recoleta Cultural Center) ★ The distinctive building—originally designed as a Franciscan convent—hosts Argentine and international art exhibits, experimental theater works, occasional music concerts, and an interactive science museum for children called Museo de Ciencias Participativas, where children are encouraged to touch and play with the displays. The Hard Rock Cafe is behind the Cultural Center in the Recoleta Design Shopping Center. Junín 1930. ✆ **11/4803-1041.** Tickets $2–$3 (£1.35–£2). No metro access.

Grupo de Teatro Catalinas Sur This theater company presents outdoor weekend performances in La Boca. It's in Spanish, but it's mostly comedy, and both adults and children are likely to enjoy the productions. Av. Benito Pérez Galdós 93 (at Caboto). ✆ **11/4300-5707.** www.catalinasur.com.ar. Tickets $3–$10 (£2–£6.80). No metro access.

Julio Bocca's Ballet Argentino ★★★ Julio Bocca is Argentina's greatest ballet and dance star. Many of his performances combine tango movements with classical dance, creating a style uniquely his own, and uniquely Argentine. He runs a studio in the Centro Cultural de Borges for classical dance and ballet performances, as well as another performance space in Teatro Maipo on Calle Esmeralda, offering a range of events from dance to comedy plays. Mr. Bocca himself has officially retired, but even without him on stage, his Ballet Argentino troupe is a must-see for lovers of ballet and dance, especially the performances featuring Claudia Figaredo and Hernan Piquin. In the Centro Cultural de Borges, within Galerías Pacífico (at the corner of Viamonte and San Martín). ✆ **11/5555-5359.** www.juliobocca.com. Tickets $5–$19 (£3.40–£13). Metro: San Martín. Teatro Maipo spaces, Esmeralda 449, at Corrientes. ✆ **11/4394-5521.** Metro: Lavalle.

Luna Park Once the home of international boxing matches, the Luna is the largest indoor stadium in Argentina, hosting some of the biggest shows and concerts in Buenos Aires. Many of these are classical music concerts, and the National Symphonic Orchestra often plays here. Though they had actually met previously, legend has it that a 1944 fundraiser here, for the victims of the San Juan earthquake, was where Juan Perón first met a very young actress named Eva Duarte, changing Argentine history forever. The song "On This Night of a Thousand Stars" in the musical commemorates this event. Av. Corrientes and Bouchard. ✆ **11/4311-1990.** www.lunapark.com.ar. Metro: L. N. Alem.

Silvia Freire, Espacio de Arte y Cultura A little religious, a little New Age-y, this Palermo institution sells avant-garde art and hosts theater presentations. Silvia Freire is considered a bit of an eccentric mystic, and she is interesting to meet if she happens to be in the building when you arrive. Store hours: Wednesday and Thursday 10am to 3pm. Performance hours vary based on programs; call for information. Cabrera 4849 (at Acevedo). ✆ **11/4831-1441.** Tickets $5–$10 (£3.40–£6.80). Metro: Plaza Italia.

Teatro Coliseo This Recoleta theater puts on classical music productions. Marcelo T. de Alvear 1125 (at Cerrito). ✆ **11/4816-5943.** Metro: San Martín.

Teatro Colón (Colón Theater) ★★★ **Moments** A more detailed description of this venue appears in "Other Attractions," earlier in this chapter. The building itself is a major tourist stop, in addition to being a performance space. The building is under ongoing renovations which have been seriously delayed and are likely not to be completed until 2010. If you're lucky enough to be traveling when the work is complete, don't miss this venue: The memory of an opera or musical in the Teatro Colón will last a lifetime. Depending on the progress of renovation, limited tours will also resume. Calle Libertad 621 (at Tucumán). ✆ **11/4378-7100.** www.teatrocolon.org.ar. Metro: Tribunales.

Teatro Gran Rex Within this large theater, you'll be able to see many national and foreign music concerts. Av. Corrientes 857 (at Suipacha). ✆ **11/4322-8000.** Metro: Carlos Pellegrini.

Teatro Municipal General San Martín This entertainment complex has three theaters staging drama, comedy, ballet, music, and children's plays. The lobby in itself, which often hosts exhibitions of photography and art, is worth a special visit during the daytime. The theater has also absorbed many productions that would have ordinarily

been in Opera Colon. Lobby exhibitions are usually free. Corrientes 1530 (at Paraná). ✆ **0800/333-5254.** Metro: Uruguay.

Teatro Nacional Cervantes Some of the city's best theater takes place here, in this production house originally built by a group of Spanish actors as a thank you to Buenos Aires. The building is sumptuous, in an ornate Spanish Imperial style, using materials brought from Spain. In 2008 and 2009, a restoration program has helped the detailed facade gleam anew. Calle Libertad 815 (at Córdoba). ✆ **11/4816-4224.** Metro: Tribunales.

Teatro Opera This futuristic, streamlined Art Deco theater has been adapted for Broadway-style shows. The building is itself a unique and rare example of Art Deco in Buenos Aires. The facade has undergone a partial renovation, which has revealed the lightning-bolt glass panels once hidden by advertising signs. Av. Corrientes 860 (at Suipacha). ✆ **11/4326-1335.** Metro: Carlos Pellegrini.

Teatro Presidente Alvear Tango and other music shows take place at this theater. Av. Corrientes 1659 (at Montevideo). ✆ **11/4374-6076.** Metro: Callao.

THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

Tango Shows

In Buenos Aires, you can watch the tango or dance the tango. You'll have many opportunities to see the dance during your visit: Tango and *milonga* dancers frequent the streets of La Boca and San Telmo, some hotels offer tango shows in their lobbies and bars, and tango salons blanket the city. San Telmo's are the most famous (besides Café Tortoni), and they usually combine dinner and a show. Call a radio-taxi, or *remise,* to get to San Telmo, La Boca, or Barracas at night. For safety's sake, don't take the metro there or walk. Most of the tango shows also offer direct transportation. While we include some general ticket prices as a guide, ask your hotel concierge for special ticket prices, which include transportation from the hotel (usually a shuttle bus). Travel agencies can also sometimes book tickets at group rates.

Café Tortoni High-quality yet inexpensive tango shows take place in the back room of the Café Tortoni. The prices do not include dinner as in other tango shows, but you can order off the menu and pay extra here. Shows are every day at 9pm except Tuesday. Av. de Mayo 829. ✆ **11/4342-4328.** No cover. Metro: Plaza de Mayo.

El Querandí El Querandí offers the best historically based tango show in the city, tracing the tradition from its early roots in bordellos, when only men danced it, to its current leggy, sexy style. A great slab of beef and glass of wine come with the show. Open Monday through Saturday; dinner begins at 8:30pm, followed by the show at 10:15pm. Perú 302 at Moreno. ✆ **11/4345-0331.** Tickets $60–$80 (£41–£54). Metro: Moreno or Bolívar.

El Viejo Almacén The most famous of the city's tango salons, the Almacén offers what some consider the city's most authentic performance. Shows involve traditional Argentine-style tango (many other shows feature international-style tango). Sunday through Thursday shows are at 10pm; Friday and Saturday shows are at 9:30 and 11:45pm. Dinner is served each night before the show starts, in the three-story restaurant across the street. Guests may opt for dinner and the show or show only. Some hotels offer transportation. Independencia and Balcarce. ✆ **11/4307-6689.** Tickets $60–$80 (£41–£54). Metro: Independencia.

Esquina Carlos Gardel ★ In my opinion, this is one of the most elegant tango shows. It's on the former site of the Chanta Cuatro—a restaurant where Carlos Gardel

used to dine with his friends—though the building is new. The luxurious old-time-style dining room features high-tech acoustics and superb dancers, creating a wonderful environment for this excellent performance. Doors open at 8pm. Carlos Gardel 3200 at Anchorena, across from the Abasto Shopping Center. ✆ **11/4876-6363.** Tickets $80–$100 (£54–£68). Metro: Carlos Gardel.

Señor Tango This enormous theater is more akin to a Broadway production hall than a traditional tango salon, but the dancers are fantastic. The owner, who clearly loves to perform, is also a good singer. Walls are covered with photos of what appears to be every celebrity who's ever visited Buenos Aires—and all seem to have made it to Señor Tango. Diners choose among steak, chicken, or fish for dinner. Despite the huge crowd, the food quality is commendable. Have dinner or come only for the show (dinner is at 8:30pm; shows start at 10pm). Vieytes 1653 at Domingo. ✆ **11/4303-0212.** Tickets $120 (£81). No metro access.

Tango Dance Clubs (Milongas)

Tango palaces and dance performances are wonderful, but nothing compares to the lure of a *milonga* (tango salon), and Buenos Aires seems to have more now than ever. Rather than destroy tango, the peso crisis has heightened its popularity, here and abroad. Just as the early Porteños turned to tango a century ago to alleviate their pain and isolation, now modern residents are dancing their melancholy away. With the increase in tourism and the enormous number of Europeans and North Americans lured here by the dance, the number of *milongas* is unprecedented.

The numbers listed here are not necessarily those of the venues, but rather the dance organizations that organize the events, often with rotating venues. For further details, check the listings in ***La Milonguera*** or ***El Tangauta,*** the city's tango magazines. There's usually a $5 to $10 (£3.40–£6.80) fee to get into a *milonga.* Tango, like most nightlife in Buenos Aires, is a very late affair; most *milongas* don't get busy until 2am—even on weeknights.

Most importantly: Note that this scene is not without its rules and obstacles. Tango is an art form and a unique part of Buenos Aires culture. You should never enter a *milonga* with the obvious air of a clueless tourist, which might alter the atmosphere of a venue. You might even be refused entry or asked to leave if your behavior or appearance upsets the balance of a place in some of the smaller and more traditional venues. In fact, some of the city's underground *milongas* aren't listed anywhere and require a contact to get in, akin to a 1920s speak-easy. If possible, attend a *milonga* with a local who knows the scene.

El Arranque Finds This dance venue looks like a Knights of Columbus hall, but it's one of the most authentic venues for *milongas;* it's also one of the few places that hosts afternoon dancing. Tango's late-night schedule could drive even a vampire crazy, but here you can dance and still get a real night's sleep afterward. No matter how old and pot-bellied a man is, he can be with any woman in the crowd as long as he dances well. Even older women, however, tend to keep up appearances here, dressing beautifully and stylishly. This place will be very comfortable for older crowds. They strictly enforce traditional tango rules about separating the sexes, however; couples might not even be allowed to sit together. Dancing begins most afternoons at 3pm. Closed Monday. Bartolomé Mitre 1759 (at Callao). ✆ **11/4371-6767.** Admission $5 (£3.40). Metro: Congreso.

El Beso Nightclub Finds The way to this club may be a little confusing, but follow my directions and you'll be fine. It's unmarked, so the street address is your only indication

that you're in the right spot. Walk upstairs, pay your fee, and squeeze past the crowded bar blocking your view. The small space beyond maintains the air of a 1940s nightclub, updated for the modern era with brilliant reds and modern abstractions painted on some of its walls. Ceiling lamps made from car air filters cast a golden glow on the dancers. Some of the best performers drag their egos with them to the floor, so if you're not so good on your feet, just watch; the last thing you want is to bump into someone. The divisions between the *milongueras* and *milongueros* are not so strong, and the sexes tend to mix informally. Reserve a table ahead of time if you can. Different *milongas* take place on different nights. Check their calendar in advance for details. Snacks, wine, and beer are on sale. Riobamba 416 (at Corrientes). ✆ **11/4953-2794** or 11/15-4938-8108 (cell). Admission $5 (£3.40). Metro: Callao.

El Niño Bien ★★ Finds If you want to travel back in time, to an era when tango ruled Buenos Aires, few places will do you better than El Niño Bien. The beautiful main dance hall is straight from the Belle Epoque; you'll half-expect Carlos Gardel himself to show up behind the mic. Dressed in black, men and women tango while patrons at side tables respectfully study their techniques. Don't look too closely at anyone, however, unless you know what you're doing: *Milonga* eyes—staring across a room to attract a partner onto the dance floor—are taken seriously. Food is served, but don't bother unless you're famished; it's only so-so. Unfortunately, Niño Bien is becoming a victim of its own success, and many tour groups are starting to unload here. If you're looking to find a tango teacher, one will probably find you first at this venue; many instructors come here seeking students for private lessons. Centro Región Leonesa, Humberto I no. 1462 (at San José). ✆ **11/4483-2588.** Admission $5–$6 (£3.40–£4.05). No metro access.

La Viruta Finds This is one of the most interesting *milongas.* It is authentic, but it attracts a very young crowd of Porteños and expats who have come from all over the world to dance their lives away in Buenos Aires, where the living is good and cheap. Many nights it is just a *milonga.* Other nights host shows and competitions, many involving tango and folkloric and modern dance. La Viruta is in the cellar of the Armenian Community Center. When decorated with balloons for some events, it looks a little like a high school prom from the 1970s. Armenia 1366 (at Cabrera). ✆ **11/4774-6357.** Admission $8 (£5.40). No metro access.

Mano a Mano at Plaza Bohemia Finds This Thursday-night-only *milonga* event is run by Helen Halldórsdóttir, a native of Iceland whom tango lovers all over Buenos Aires simply call La Vikinga. She used to run a *milonga* called Bien Pulenta, and uses a similar format here at her new event. It's an excellent choice, with her very welcoming tango classes from 9 to 10:30pm, and a practice *milonga* for students until just after midnight, when the real *milonga* begins. She gets a particularly attractive crowd, many of whom are professional dancers and who come here to hang out after performing at shows across Buenos Aires. But don't be intimidated, as Helen mixes the dancing sets up with live performances. There's a bit of flair, with live bands, shows, and special guests such as visiting tango champions; you'll enjoy yourself even if you're a wallflower. Maipú 444 (at Corrientes). ✆ **11/15-5865-8279** (cell). Admission $8 (£5.40). Metro: Florida or Lavalle.

Salón Canning Finds This is among the most authentic of all of the *milongas.* At the end of a long hallway, spectators crowd around the main dance floor to watch couples make their way around it. Salón Canning is known for its extremely smooth, high-quality wooden parquet floor, considered one of the best for dancing in all of Buenos Aires. This tango hall is among the few things left in Buenos Aires that still bear the name

Moments Tango Lowdown

It seems impossible to imagine Argentina without thinking of tango, its greatest export to the world. First danced by working-class men in La Boca, San Telmo, and the port area, tango originated with a guitar and violin toward the end of the 19th century. Combining African rhythms with the *habanera* and *candombe*, it was not the sophisticated dance you know today. It originated in brothels, known locally as *quilombos*, and was considered too obscene for women—even "working" women. Men would actually dance it with each other as they waited their turn in the lounges of brothels.

Increasing waves of immigrants added Italian elements to tango, which helped the dance make its way to Europe. It was eventually internationalized in Paris. With a sense of approval from Europe, Argentine middle and upper classes began to accept the newly refined dance as part of their cultural identity. The form blossomed under the extraordinary voice of Carlos Gardel, who brought tango to Broadway and Hollywood. Astor Piazzola further heightened the international recognition of tango music, increasing its complexity by incorporating classical elements.

Tango music usually involves a piano and *bandoneón*—an instrument akin to an accordion. If a singer is participating, the lyrics might come from one of Argentina's great poets, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Homero Manzi, or Horacio Ferrer. Themes focus on a downtrodden life or a woman's betrayal, making it akin to American jazz and blues, which developed at the same time. The dance itself is improvised, consisting of a series of long walks and intertwined movements, usually in eight-step. The man and woman glide across the floor, with the man leading the way through early flirtatious movements that give way to dramatic leads and heartfelt turns. These movements—including kicks that simulate knife movements, or the sliding, shuffled feet that mimic a gangster silently stealing up to murder someone—reflect the dance's rough origins, even though tango today is refined and beautiful. The dancing style in salons is much more subtle and subdued than "show tango."

Tango lessons are an excellent way for a visitor to get a sense of what makes the music—and the dance—so alluring. Most respectable dancers would not show up before midnight, giving you the perfect opportunity to sneak in for a group lesson, offered at most of the salons starting around 9pm. They usually cost between $5 and $8 (£3.40–£5.40) for an hour; you can request private instruction for between $20 and $40 (£14–£27) per hour, depending on the instructor. In summer, the city of Buenos Aires promotes tango by offering free classes in many locations. Visit the nearest tourist information center for updated information.

of George Canning—a British diplomat who opened relations between Argentina and Great Britain after independence from Spain. Scalabrini Ortiz 1331 (at Gorriti). ✆ **11/4832-6753.** Admission $8 (£5.40). No metro access.

Other Dance Clubs

Dancing in Buenos Aires is not just about tango; the majority of the younger population prefers salsa and techno beats. Of course, nothing in life changes quite so fast as the "in" discos, so ask around for the latest hot spots. The biggest nights out are Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. The websites www.adondevamos.com and www.bsasinsomnio.com.ar are great resources for Buenos Aires nightlife. Club entry will generally run $15 to $25 (£10–£17). The city's best salsa dancers head to **Salsón,** Av. Alvarez Thomas 1166 (✆ **11/4551-6551**), a megaclub that offers lessons on Wednesday and Friday evenings at 9pm. In Palermo Soho, head to **Kika,** Honduras 5339, at Juan B. Justo (✆ **11/4137-5311;** www.kikaclub.com.ar), for rock and techno. Some of the city's largest clubs are in the Costa Salguero riverfront industrial complex, near Palermo but far from where they can wake anybody up. They include **Pachá,** Avenida Costanera Norte at Pampa (✆ **11/4788-4280;** www.pachabuenosaires.com), modeled after the iconic Ibiza original. Call ahead for VIP tables. Nearby, **Tequila,** Costanera Norte and La Pampa (✆ **11/4788-0438**), is packed every night; and **La Diosa,** Rafael Obligado 3731, off Avenida Costanera Norte (✆ **11/4806-9443** or 11/15-4997-2082 [cell]; www.ladiosabuenosaires.com.ar), caters to a young, mixed crowd. The most popular gay and lesbian club is **Amerika,** Gascón 1040, at Córdoba in Barrio Norte (✆ **11/4865-4416**), which has two floors of dance music on Friday and Saturday. Straight Porteños come often too, claiming it has the best music, generally staying on the smaller upstairs level.

THE BAR SCENE

Buenos Aires has no shortage of popular bars, and Porteños need little excuse to party. The following are only a few of the bars and pubs worthy of recommendation. Strolling along, you'll find plenty on your own. Most smoking now takes place outside, though you'll still find plenty of people breaking the ban indoors.

The Alamo-Shoeless Joe's No matter what time of day it is, you'll find something going on at this American-owned 24/7 bar. The Alamo-Shoeless Joe's was originally simply called Shoeless Joe's, but when the Texas-born owner Pete found Argentines could not pronounce it, he added a homage to his home state in the name. The bar is also managed with Dave from Chicago, a friend. It's a great gathering place for football games and other American sports events, but even locals come too. Breakfast specials are a treat after being out all night clubbing, and there's beer of all kinds by the bottle or on tap in huge pitchers, along with student discounts, free pizza during the happy hour from 8 to 10pm during the week, and other bargains. Food is a simple selection, with most mains running about $3 to $10 (£2–£6.80). With the free Internet station, you'll find another reason to come by. Uruguay 1175 and 1177, btw. Santa Fe and Arenales. ✆ **11/4813-7324.** www.elalamobar.com. Metro: Callao.

Chandon Bar This intimate champagne lounge serves bottles and flutes of Chandon, produced in France and Argentina. In Puerto Madero, adjacent to some of the city's best restaurants, Chandon is perfect for drinks before or after dinner. Light fare is offered as well. Av. Alicia Moreau de Justo 152, at Alvear. ✆ **11/4315-3533.** Metro: L. N. Alem.

Cronico Bar The bar has overlooked Plaza Serrano for over 20 years, and its movie posters outside are probably the first thing you'll notice. Inside, you'll find a busy place where people sit at tables painted with nude women in the style of Picasso. There's typical bar food such as sandwiches and hamburgers, but with a larger menu than most of the surrounding bars. Live rock music sometimes entertains the crowd. Borges 1646, at Plaza Serrano. ✆ **11/4833-0708.** Metro: Plaza Italia.

Gran Bar Danzon A small, intimate bar, Danzon attracts a fashionable crowd with its small selection of international food and smart, relaxing lounge music. An excellent barman serves exquisite cocktails. Libertad 1161 at Santa Fe. ✆ **11/4811-1108.** www.granbardanzon.com.ar. Metro: San Martín.

The Kilkenny This trendy cafe/bar is more like a rock house than an Irish pub, although you will still be able to order Guinness, Kilkenny, and Harp draft beers. It's packed with locals and foreigners, and you are as likely to find people in suits and ties as in jeans and T-shirts. The Kilkenny offers happy hour from 6 to 8pm and live bands every night after midnight; it stays open until 5am. Marcelo T. de Alvear 399, at Reconquista. ✆ **11/4312-9179** or 11/4312-7291. Metro: San Martín.

Plaza Bar Nearly every Argentine president and his or her cabinet have come here, in addition to visiting celebs such as the queen of Spain, the emperor of Japan, Luciano Pavarotti, and David Copperfield. A vague mix of Art Deco and English country, the bar features mahogany furniture and velvet upholstery, where guests sip martinis and other high-end drinks. Tuxedo-clad waiters recommend a fine selection of whiskeys and brandies. In 2005, *Forbes* magazine declared it among the world's top nine hotel bars, based on several factors—the clientele, the beverage selection, and the way the staff makes everyone feel welcome, even if they come only once in a lifetime. This was at one time the city's most famous cigar bar, but the 2006 anti-smoking law put an end to that decades-long tradition. Nevertheless, add it to your list of things to do. Inside the Marriott Plaza Hotel, Calle Florida 1005, at Santa Fe (overlooking Plaza San Martín). ✆ **11/4318-3000.** Metro: San Martín.

Plaza Dorrego Bar ★ Representative of a typical Porteño bar from the 19th century, Plaza Dorrego displays portraits of Carlos Gardel, antique liquor bottles in cases along the walls, and anonymous writings engraved in the wood. Stop by on Sunday, when the crowd spills onto the street and you can catch the San Telmo antiques market on the plaza in front. Calle Defensa 1098, at Humberto Primo (overlooking Plaza Dorrego). ✆ **11/4361-0141.** Metro: Constitución.

Rey Castro ★ A giant statue of Castro greets you as you enter this club and restaurant. They have an excellent Caribbean menu, and hot salsa and Latin dancing on two levels. Monday to Thursday, come for the happy hour from 6 to 9:30pm, with an emphasis on mojitos and Cuba Libres. Calle Peru 342, at Moreno. ✆ **11/4342-9998.** www.reycastro.com. Metro: Moreno.

The Shamrock The city's best-known Irish pub is lacking in authenticity; you're more likely to hear hot Latin rhythms than soft Gaelic music here. That said, it remains hugely popular with Argentines and foreign visitors alike, and it's a great spot to begin the night. There is an enormous game room with pool tables and other attractions in the basement. Rodríguez Peña 1220, at Juncal. ✆ **11/4812-3584.** Metro: Callao.

Sugar Owned by two Brits and an American, this Palermo Soho spot has become trendy with English-speaking expats who have decided to make Buenos Aires their home. When major news or athletic events happen of interest to the English-speaking world, this is where people gather to watch it. They have an inexpensive bar menu, focused on inexpensive comfort food ranging from $5 to $10 (£3.40–£6.80). Nights and weekends, come for their 5-peso-a-drink happy hour, from 8pm to midnight, and DJ-accompanied mingling. Costa Rica 4619, at Armenia. ✆ **11/15-6894-2002** (cell). www.sugarbuenosaires.com. No metro access.

The Pampas, the Coast & Other Side Trips from Buenos Aires

by Michael Luongo

If you're spending more than 4 or 5 days in Buenos Aires, you might want to consider a side trip—especially if you're visiting in summer, when many Porteños hit the beach resorts. **Mar del Plata** is the country's most popular stretch of shore, and some of the country's most famous musicians and other entertainers follow the beachgoers there. To describe Mar del Plata as crowded in summer is an understatement, as more than eight million people visit in December, January, and February alone. Nearby, the town of **Miramar** offers a quieter beach vacation at a slower pace.

La Plata is the capital of Buenos Aires Province, planned in 1880 along neoclassical lines. Full of diagonals and parks, it is an interesting and open city with various museums and other sites of historical interest, which you can visit year-round.

Just outside Buenos Aires's suburbs is the **Tigre Delta,** a beautiful complex of islands and marshland full of small bed-and-breakfasts, resorts, and adventure trails. You can make a day trip here on mass transit from Buenos Aires, or you can choose to stay overnight. It is busiest in the summer season, but most sites and hotels are open year-round.

The Pampas surround Buenos Aires, and here you'll find gauchos and the stuff of Argentine cowboy lore. The region's main town is **San Antonio de Areco,** about 90 minutes north of the capital. Few people stay in town, preferring to lodge at the surrounding *estancias* (19th-c. ranch farms), several of which are detailed here.

1 MAR DEL PLATA

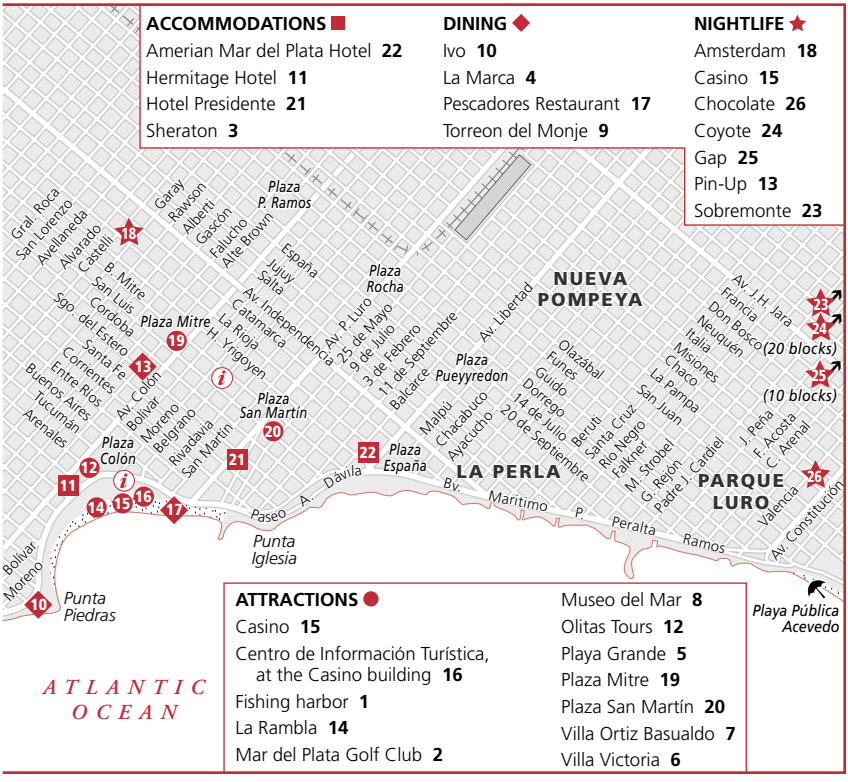
400km (248 miles) S of Buenos Aires

Argentina's most popular beach resort is a sleepy coastal city of about 700,000 long-term residents—until mid-December, when Porteños flock here through March for their summer vacation. Nearly eight million vacationers will pass through in the summer season, the vast majority of them Argentines. Although it's not as luxurious as Uruguay's Punta del Este—the beach favorite of many jet-setting Argentines—Mar del Plata is closer to Buenos Aires and far cheaper. Its long, windy coastline is known for its crowded, tan-bodied beaches and quieter seaside coves, and beautiful landscapes farther inland, leading to the edge of the grassy Pampas. The resort was at one time very exclusive, but during the Perón era many hotels and high-rises were built for labor unions and the middle class, changing both the social and physical makeup of the city forever. Some of the magnificent French- and Tudor-style mansions, which housed Argentina's summer elites in the early 20th century, have been meticulously preserved as museums.

Mar del Plata offers excellent nightlife in summer, when independent theater companies from Buenos Aires come to town, and nightclubs open their doors to passionate Latin partygoers. The months of December, January, and February are the most crowded, wild, and expensive for visiting. In March, families with children and retired couples on vacation make up the bulk of visitors, who take advantage of a more relaxed atmosphere and the slight reduction in prices. Many hotels and restaurants remain open year-round; though the weather is chillier, people do vacation here on weekends in winter too. While Argentines will tell you stories about family vacations here over the generations, the city only hit the international radar during the November 2005 Summit of the Americas, when massive protests took place against the former U.S. president George W. Bush's presence. Much of the city was blocked off during that time period, disrupting locals from their daily lives, and many people still have much to say about the visit.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE You can reach Mar del Plata by plane, car, bus, train, or boat. The airport lies 10 minutes from downtown and is served by **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (✆ **800/333-0276** in the U.S., or 0810/222-86527 in Argentina; www.aerolineas.com.



ar). Flights last just under an hour, and there are about three flights a day. Cabs will cost about $12 to $17 (£8.20–£12) into the center of to wn. The RN 2 is the main highway from Buenos Aires to Mar del Plata; it takes about 4 to 5 hours to driv e between these cities. More than 50 bus companies link Mar del Plata with the rest of the country. Buses from Buenos Aires, which arrive at the central bus terminal at Alberti 1602 (✆ **223/451-5406**), are comfortable and cost under $30 (£20) each way . They leave Buenos Aires at the Retiro Bus Station. A train r un by the company F errobaires also connects M ar del Plata with B uenos Aires, and it's only slightly mor e expensive than the buses. I t leaves Buenos Aires from **Constitución,** in the southern par t of the capital, and r uns thr ee times a day. In Mar del P lata, purchase tickets at the train station, located at av enidas Luro and Italia (✆ **223/475-6076** in Mar del Plata, or 11/4304-0028 in Buenos Aires). Bus and train trips take about 4 to 5 hours.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Centro de Información Turística,** Bd. Marítimo PP Ramos 2270, at the Casino building (✆ **223/495-1777;** www.mardelplata.gov.ar), has a knowledgeable, helpful staff offering maps and suggested itineraries. It is open daily from 8am to 9pm. There is also a branch at the airpor t. An additional w ebsite for tourism information is www.mdp.com.ar.

GETTING AROUND La Rambla marks the heart of the city, the seaside walk in front of the casino and main city beach. This area is walkable on its own, with restaurants and other businesses clustered here and between the nearby bus station and Plaza San Martín. Farther south, the Los Tronces neighborhood houses the city's most prominent residences as well as Playa Grande (the main beach), the Sheraton hotel, and the Mar del Plata Golf Club. Mar del Plata has 47km (29 miles) of Atlantic coastline, so if you plan to go to that part of the city, you'll need to take a taxi or rent a car. **Avis** (✆ **223/470-2100;** www.avis.com.ar) rents cars at the airport.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

The main reason to visit Mar del Plata is the beaches, all of which spread out from the city's heart at **Plaza Colón.** Here you'll find the **Mar del Plata Casino** (✆ **223/495-7011;** www.loteria.gba.gov.ar). The red brick–and-granite structure guarded by sea lion sculptures is the social center of the city. Walkways and steps lead from here to the beach, with many people posing in front of the giant granite sea lions for their only-in–Mar del Plata photos. In the early evening, as the crowds head home from the beach, you'll often see street performers and musicians here. (Watch your pockets if you stand and admire.) With long, slow breaks, **Waikiki** is the best spot for surfing. The coastline is nice, but you should not come expecting to find the Caribbean—the Atlantic remains fairly cold, even during summer. Once you've brushed off the sand, visit the **fishing harbor,** where hundreds of red and yellow boats unload their daily catches. The harbor houses a colony of 800 male sea lions that come to bathe on the rocky shores. (Be warned that btw. the sea lions and the fishing boats, it's an olfactory disaster.) Next to the colony, there's an ugly but intriguing boat graveyard where rusty boats have been left to rot away.

In the Los Tronces neighborhood, **Villa Victoria,** at Matheu 1851, at Arenales (✆ **223/492-0569**), showcases the early-20th-century summerhouse of wealthy Argentine writer Victoria Ocampo, who published the Argentine literary magazine *Sud* and was the first female member of the Argentine Academy of Letters. Some of Argentina's greatest authors have stayed here visiting her writing salons, including Jorge Luis Borges. It is open year-round Thursday to Tuesday from 1 to 8pm, with an admission charge of about $3 (£2). In summer, musical and theatrical performances are held in the gardens, with various entry prices depending on the event. **Villa Ortiz Basualdo,** Av. Colón 1189 (✆ **223/486-1636**), is an English-style Victorian mansion decorated with exquisite Art Nouveau furniture from Belgium. The building is open daily from 10am to 10pm with an entry charge of just over $1 (70p). In the same neighborhood, the **Museo del Mar,** Av. Colón 1114, at Viamonte (✆ **223/451-9779;** www.museodelmar.com), houses a collection of 30,000 seashells. Stop in for a bite at their cafe, surrounded by tanks of sharks staring at you and your meal. This is an ideal spot for visiting if you're with kids, and the rooftop terrace has an amazing view to the ocean a few blocks away. In summer, it is open Sunday to Friday 9am to 7pm and Saturday 9am to 10pm. During the winter, it's open daily from 9am to 1pm. Admission is about $2 (£1.35) for the museum, and various prices for lectures and other events at the adjacent auditorium.

Twenty minutes from the city center, **De Los Padres Lake and Hills** is a picturesque forest with wide parks surrounding the lake, perfect for an afternoon picnic. Nearby, in the Barrio Sierra de los Padres, is the **Zoo El Paraíso,** Ruta 266, Km 16.5 (✆ **223/463-0347;** www.zooelparaisoonline.com.ar). The park is open daily 10am to 7pm, with a charge of $8 (£5.40) for adults and $3 (£2) for children. It features a wonderful collection of flora and fauna, including plants and trees from all over Argentina as well as lions, pumas, monkeys, llamas, and other animals. For information on surfing, deep-sea

fishing, mountain biking, horseback riding, trekking, and other adventure sports, contact the tourism office.

The tour company **Olitas Tours** also does half-day city tours, as well as a special tour for children on a bus filled with clowns. Visit their kiosk at Plaza Colón, call ✆ **223/472-6810,** or log on to www.olitas-tours.com.ar.

WHERE TO STAY

Amerian Mar del Plata Hotel The Amerian is an Argentine chain hotel, and this branch in Mar del Plata overlooks Plaza España and La Perla Beach. The hotel is surrounded by several nightclubs, so it can be noisy at night. Prices can differ depending on sea or city view. Rooms are spacious, however, especially for the price category. Junior suites, positioned at angles, all have some form of sea view, even if it's not direct. Suites come with Jacuzzi tubs, and all the bathrooms are on the large size no matter the category. Parking is free on-site. Wi-Fi is available in the rooms and in the lobby, along with a small computer station. There is no gym or pool, though staff will help guests arrange to visit one nearby.

Av. Libertad 2936 (at La Rioja and Yrigoyen), 7600 Mar del Plata. ✆ **223/491-2000.** Fax 223/491-2300. www.amerian.com. 58 units (52 doubles, 6 suites). From $75 (£51) double; from $150 (£102) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; access to nearby pool and fitness center; concierge; business center; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; Internet station; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

The Hermitage Hotel This is Mar del Plata's grande dame hotel, opened in 1943 and where celebrities often make an appearance. The lobby is rendered in a classical style, with gilded friezes of fishermen and Louis XV elements. Art and photos of old Mar del Plata adorn the walls, and the flow of spaces might remind visitors of Rio's Copacabana Palace Hotel. The hotel added the Torre Colón in 2002 and renovated all the rooms in the old building at the same time. The rooms in the new building are nicer and pricier, affording either sea or city views. The formal restaurant Luis Alberto, where breakfast is served as well as lunch and dinner, is in an atrium connecting the two buildings. The hotel has its own private casino and beach area, connected via an underground passageway, with bar and towel service from 8am to 10pm. The casino is open 3pm to midnight Sunday to Thursday, and until 4am Friday and Saturday. While the hotel faces the ocean via its original lobby, the Torre Colón lobby is the main entrance. There is a small gym and spa, and the rooftop heated pool has a spectacular sea view.

Bd. PP Ramos 2657 and Av. Colón 1643 (overlooking the Casino), 7600 Mar del Plata. ✆ **223/451-9081.** Fax 223/451-7235. www.hermitagehotel.com.ar. 300 units (240 doubles, 60 suites). From $159 (£108) double in old building; from $181 (£123) double in new building; from $256–$288 (£173–£195) suites. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $10 (£6.80). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; casino; pool; health club; spa; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, large safe.

Hotel Presidente This small four-star hotel, owned by the Spanish chain Hoteles Alvarez, is about a block from the beach. An older property, it's full of dark woods, and some of the rooms are on the small side. The pleasant staff more than makes up for any faults in the decor. Some amenities, such as the restaurant Tartufu, where breakfast is served, and the small gym, are shared with the neighboring Hotel Iruña, owned by the same company. Breakfast is included in the rates, and even some of the side rooms have sea views. Rooms facing the sea cost a little more, but overall this hotel is a good choice for those who want good service on a reasonable budget. Each room comes with a small

desk and vanity, and while there is no air-conditioning, the ceiling fan keeps the room comfortable. Parking is available for an additional $8 (£5.40) a day. A small convention center on the eighth floor hosts meetings, and the lobby bar can be very busy. Here, you'll also find two computer terminals with free Internet access.

Corrientes 1516 at Diagonal J. B. Alberdi, 7600 Mar del Plata. ✆ **223/491-1060.** Fax 223/491-1183. www.hotelpresidente.com. 53 units (45 doubles, 8 suites). From $110 (£75) double with city view; $124 (£84) double with sea view; from $105 (£71) suites. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $8 (£5.40). **Amenities:** Restaurant; lobby bar; small health club; spa; concierge; car-rental desk; business center; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; Internet stations. *In room:* TV, Wi-Fi, hair dryer, safe.

Sheraton ★★ The Sheraton overlooks the golf course and the military port, near Playa Grande. Rooms were recently renovated and include their trademark Sheraton Suite Sleeper beds. The hotel has a children's area and a video arcade, making it a great choice for families. There are two pools, one indoor and one outdoor A $15 (£10) charge applies to use of the indoor pool, connected to the spa and sauna complex. Two restaurants are in the hotel: the informal **La Pampa,** open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with an international menu, as well as the formal **Las Barcas,** only open for dinner Wednesday to Sunday. The gym received all-new equipment in 2007. With its view to the sea, it's simply stunning for a workout. A garden surrounds the outdoor pool, free of charge to use, but it's only open in the summer. Rooms are airy and even standards seem oversize; suites have Jacuzzi tubs.

Alem 4221 overlooking the golf course, 7600 Mar del Plata. ✆ **0800/777-7002** or 223/414-0000. Fax 223/499-0009. www.sheratonmardelplata.com.ar. 191 units (160 doubles, 31 suites). From $259 (£175) double with city views; $286 (£157) double with ocean views; from $416 (£282) suites. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $15 (£8.25). Pets allowed. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; 2 pools (fee for use of indoor pool); golf; large health club; game room; concierge; business center; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

WHERE TO DINE

Ivo Cafe ★★ GREEK/ARGENTINE I can't say enough about this fantastic Greek restaurant at the bottom of a high-rise condo overlooking the ocean. It's a two-level restaurant, with sidewalk seating. The Greek owners serve Greek food along with an Argentine *parrilla* (grill). They have oversize Greek salads, excellent souvlakia, and many other Greek choices. The chic black table is also set with olives and eggplant pastes for dipping in bread. Also, while they have an English-language menu, ask for the Spanish one if you can read it; it has more and better choices. From the plate-glass windows, diners have a view of the sweeping arc of lights on the Mar del Plata shoreline. Come for dinner shows each Thursday, beginning at 9pm, with Greek dancing for a charge of about $15 (£10), which includes a meal but not the cost of drinks. Still, come in the wee hours on any day, and you'll find that the staff breaks into piano playing, singing, and traditional dancing.

Bd. Marítimo 3027 at Güemes. ✆ **223/486-3160.** www.ivocafe.com. Main courses $6–$12 (£4.05–£8.20). AE, MC, V. Daily 24 hr. in summer; winter Sun–Thurs 8am–3am, Fri–Sat 24 hr.

La Marca ★★ ARGENTINE This restaurant became famous for serving a whole cow upon special request, for large groups of 50 or more people. It's not often that they do that anymore, but La Marca remains the town's best *parrilla,* serving thick rump steaks, tenderloins, and barbecued ribs of beef, flanks, and other cuts of beef. The tender filet mignon with mushroom sauce is delicious. The menu includes pork chops, sausages,

sweetbreads, black pudding, and other delights as well. The salad bar is extensive. Service is polite and unhurried. Make sure to try the *dulce de leche* before you leave.

Almafuerte 253. ✆ **223/451-8072.** www.lamarcarestaurant.com.ar. Main courses $3–$10 (£2–£6.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 8:30pm–1am.

Pescadores Restaurant ★★ SEAFOOD You'll see this restaurant the moment you pull into Mar del Plata, only because it's under the enormous Quilmes neon billboard sign on the pier. This three-level restaurant juts into the ocean and is one of the best seafood restaurants in town. Built into the Fisherman's Club, it's the next best thing to catching the fish yourself. Fish of all kinds—sole, salmon, calamari, lobster, oysters, and everything else local or shipped in—is here. Landlubbers will find pasta, salads, and *parrilla* offerings too, and some of the same sauces for fish double as pasta sauces. Naturally, there are a lot of white wines on the menu. We list a high top price here, but most main courses run about $10 (£6.80).

Bd. Marítimo and Av. Luro, in the Club de Pesca, on the city pier. ✆ **223/493-1713.** Main courses $3–$22 (£2–£15). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 8pm–midnight.

Torreon del Monje ★★ ARGENTINE It's hard not to notice this restaurant in Mar del Plata, inside a castlelike structure dating from 1904, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Day or night, the plate-glass windows over the sea and opening onto the street offer a fantastic view. Food runs from simple sandwiches to a *parrilla* with steak, chicken, and, of course, locally caught seafood. Almost each night, dinner shows take place while you dine, beginning at 10pm. Some are tango, others flamenco and folkloric. There is no additional charge for the shows; they're part of the experience of dining here. If you've dined elsewhere, stop in for drinks at the beautiful oak bar. During the day, many people come for the flavored and alcoholic coffee specials in the Esmeralda lounge.

Paseo Jesús de Galíndez, at the Puente del Monje, on the seafront. ✆ **223/451-9467.** www.torreondelmonje.com. Main courses $4–$10 (£2.70–£6.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 8am–2am (Fri–Sat until 4am).

MAR DEL PLATA AFTER DARK

Nightlife follows closely behind beaches as Mar del Plata's biggest draw. In summer, theater companies leave Buenos Aires to perform in this coastal resort; ask the tourism office for a schedule of performance times and places. The city's most popular bars are south of Plaza Mitre, off Calle San Luis. The best dance clubs are along Avenida Constitución, 3km (2 miles) from downtown, including **Chocolate,** Av. Constitución 4445 (✆ **223/479-4848;** www.chocolatemdq.com.ar); **Gap,** Av. Constitución 5780 (✆ **223/479-6666**), featuring live rock music; and **Sobremonte,** Av. Constitución 6690 (✆ **223/479-7930**). **Pin Up,** Santiago del Estero 2265 (no phone; www.pinupweb.com), is one of the most popular gay discos. **Coyote Ugly Bar,** Av. Constitución 6690 (✆ **223/479-2600**), is a favorite Mexican restaurant and bar, which breaks into salsa and merengue dancing as the night goes on.

2 MIRAMAR

450km (279 miles) SE of Buenos Aires

As Mar del Plata became more crowded and decidedly downscale, upper-middle-class Porteños began looking for new vacation spots. Among them is Miramar, approximately 45km (28 miles) away from Mar del Plata down the Atlantic coast on Ruta 11. The city

is green and quiet, with a relatively limited number of high-rise condominiums along its short waterfront. Most of the town's center is walkable, a few blocks from the beach. It's an ideal location for families or couples seeking a quiet vacation. The town is also blessed with a large forest reserve called the **Bosque Vivero Dunícola Florentino Ameghino** to the south, which helps to limit development. Jetties protect its shoreline, keeping the waters tranquil along the *balnearios,* or private beach kiosks peppering the shore. With the tranquillity come decidedly higher prices than you'll find in Mar del Plata.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Plusmar** (www.plusmar.com.ar) bus company runs several buses a day from Buenos Aires Retiro bus terminal. The trip takes about 5 hours, similar to heading to Mar del Plata. Contact them at ✆ **2291/433-709** in Miramar, or 11/4315-3494 in Buenos Aires. Other bus companies connecting Buenos Aires to Miramar include **Micromar,** at ✆ **2291/432-211** in Miramar, or 11/4313-3130 in Buenos Aires; and **Turismo Parque,** at ✆ **2291/431-333** in Miramar, or 11/4315-4133 in Buenos Aires. There is no central bus station in Miramar, but most buses stop on the **Plaza Central** or on the wide diagonal streets leading from it. You can also take a train from Buenos Aires's **Constitución** station to Miramar, using Ferrobaires rail services. Contact them at ✆ **11/4304-0028** in Buenos Aires, or 2291/420-657, or visit www.ferrobaires.gba.gov.ar. Trains leave Miramar Station, on Avenida 40 between calles 13 and 17. **Aeroparque Juan Domingo Perón** is a small private airport serving Miramar a few kilometers north. Call them at ✆ **2291/432-599** for information about airplane services.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Dirección Municipal de Turismo** has its office on Plaza Central at the intersections of calles 28 and 21. They are open daily from 7am to 11pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 9pm on Saturday and Sunday, year-round. Call them at ✆ **2291/420-190** (www.mga.gov.ar is the city's official site; www.miramarense.com.ar and www.ciudad-de-miramar.com.ar also offer more tourism information).

GETTING AROUND Most of what you need in this very compact city is accessible on foot. For longer distances, contact **Alvarado Remis** (✆ 2291/430-327), **Miramar Remis** (✆ 2291/430-400), or **Pronto Remis** (✆ 2291/432-452). You can't rent cars in Miramar directly, but you can arrange for rentals through travel agencies. The cars come from Mar del Plata, so arrange for one ahead of time. Call **Cosmopolitan Travel Agency** (✆ 2291/420-571), **Mabitur** (✆ 2291/422-709), or **La Plaza** (✆ 2291/431-080). **Panda Viajes,** an adventure travel company, will rent cars along with other services. They also offer an interesting 4WD beach excursion through the wooded dunes surrounding Miramar. Contact them at ✆ 2291/431-080, or visit www.pandaviajes.com. Bikes are a big deal here, and many hotels and travel companies provide them.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Beyond the beach, there is not much to do in Miramar. You can see most of the city's non-aquatic sites within an hour. Before you begin your walk, keep in mind that even-numbered streets and avenues run parallel to the ocean, and odd-numbered ones run perpendicular. The city's **Plaza Central** is really four squares in one, surrounded by calles 28, 24, 23, and 21. In the middle is a statue of **General Rudecindo Alvarado,** a hero in the Argentine independence movement from Spain. Other statues and busts of important national and local figures are scattered throughout the pine- and palm-tree-planted plaza. Kids will find plenty to do at the various local playgrounds or on the small merry-go-round nearby.

Most of the buildings surrounding the square are modern. Among them is the **Casino Miramar** at Calle 21 no. 1335, next door to the **Tourism Office** at Calle 28 (✆ **2291/420-477;** summer daily 5pm–4am). The pedestrianized street called **9 de Julio,** which is really the continuation of Calle 21, connects the Plaza Central with the beach. It's lined with shops and ice-cream places. A few blocks away is **Iglesia San Antonio,** at the intersection of calles 22 and 29. Dating from 1891, it's a small cream-colored Spanish colonial building that wouldn't look out of place in the Southern California suburbs. It has a simple interior with modern stained-glass windows and a wooden roof. Giant holy water–filled clam shells at the door casually remind you that you're in a beach town. Miramar also has a large summertime Jewish population, with the **Miramar Synagogue** serving as a community center. Its interior is small and starkly modern. It's on Calle 27, between calles 14 and 15 (✆ **2291/431-820**).

Two kilometers (1 1/4 miles) to the southwest of the town center, accessible by foot from many streets and by 4WD from Avenida 26, is the 80-hectare (200-acre) forest reserve **Vivero Dunícola Florentino Ameghino.** You can walk along the trails or take a 4WD dune excursion with Panda Viajes, mentioned in the "Getting Around" section above. About 12km (7 miles) in the same direction is the historic town of **Mar del Sud,** full of interesting turn-of-the-20th-century buildings. Golfers will want to head 2km (1 1/4 miles) northeast along the Atlantic coast from the center of town to **Links Miramar** (✆ **2291/422-244;** www.golfmiramarlinks.com.ar). The city also has a summer season inaugural parade a few days before Christmas every year, which celebrates the season in a spectacular way. Contact the tourism office for details.

WHERE TO STAY

Refugio de Mar ★ This apartment/hotel complex is a great choice for families or large groups. Each apartment is designed as its own *cabaña,* with two bathrooms, sleeping up to six people. All apartments have wooden interiors, with green bedspreads and tile floors. Apartments are fully stocked with dishes, an iron, a TV, and a DVD player. The two-level apartments have balconies and face a central courtyard with a heated outdoor pool, and there is even a small gym and game room. Maid service and breakfast are included, but the apartments rent out by the week, which is negotiable in low season.

Av. 9 (bt w. calles 14 and 16), 7607 Miramar. ✆ **2291/434-115.** www.refugiodemarmiramar.com.ar. 10 units. From $1,359 (£920) for 1 week for 6 people. Rates include continental breakfast and maid service. No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; gym; bicycles; children's programs; game room; concierge; babysitting; laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV/DVD player, Wi-Fi, kitchen, hair dryer, iron, safe, alarm system, video games.

Villasol Hostería ★ This is one of the nicest properties in Miramar, opened in 2006. It's not directly on the beach, but it's very close, and its corner location provides many rooms with sea views. The pseudo-Victorian structure of the property gives it the feel of an oversize bed-and-breakfast. Rooms are large and have a neutral color pattern with native accents, giving them a Southwestern feel. All floors are terra-cotta tiled. Bathrooms are large, and some have hydro-massage tubs. A few rooms have balconies, with wicker furniture so you can lounge in the sun or take in a view of the ocean. There are two restaurants, one downstairs for lunch and dinner, offering simple international cuisine. The breakfast room, in the attic with terraces overlooking the ocean, is a delightful place to start the morning. There is a small lounge and gym here too, along with a snack bar. Rooms are not air-conditioned, but all come with fans. Some of the rooms are also apartments, with two bedrooms but without kitchens; they're good for families or groups of friends.

Calle 6 no. 1701 (at the corner of 33); 7607 Miramar. ✆ **2291/433-017.** www.hosteriavillasol.com.ar. 8 units (4 doubles, 4 apts). From $115 (£78) double; $188 (£127) apt. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; snack bar; lounge; fitness center; bicycles; concierge; babysitting; laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* Fans, TV, Wi-Fi, kitchen (in some), minibar, hair dryer, safe, alarm system.

WHERE TO DINE

Círculo de Amigos ★ ARGENTINE/SEAFOOD This is one of the best seafood restaurants in Miramar, just a block from the Plaza Central. Some of the fish are international and come frozen; others are caught in Mar del Plata and driven in. The menu lists more than 30 fish recipes. Sole and bass are the highlights; other specialties include oysters cooked with mushrooms and lobster casserole. Some beef and vegetable dishes round out the offerings. The restaurant is enormous, and the white, blue, and gold tablecloths and furniture give it a Provençal air. Naturally, there is a large selection of white wine, much of which is stored on shelves in the back, so you can take a look and decide what you want.

Calle 21 no. 1246 (at 28th St.). ✆ **2291/422-226.** www.restcirculo.com.ar. Main courses $4–$12 (£2.70–£8.20). No credit cards. Daily noon–3pm and 8pm–midnight (sometimes later on weekends).

Van Dyke Resto Bar ARGENTINE/INTERNATIONAL On a corner plot of a diagonal street, with enormous plate-glass windows, this fun restaurant and bar feels like the center of it all, with great food and live music every Thursday night. In summer, it's open 24 hours a day, and from 6:30am to 2am in winter. It's the only bar in Miramar with *torre jirafas* (giraffe towers), elongated funnel-shaped beer kegs with spigots that sit at tables and stand a meter tall. They also have an extensive mixed drink menu. Pizza, empanadas, and a *parrilla* round out the food offerings. There's also sidewalk seating with a view of the Plaza Central. Even when the music isn't live, there's always music blasting. The owners say that on some nights, patrons just start dancing between the tables when they feel like it.

Calle 21 no. 1401 (at Diagonal Fortunato near the corner of Calle 30). ✆ **2291/423-255.** Main courses $3–$8 (£2–£5.40). No credit cards. Daily 24 hr. in summer; daily 6:30am–2am in winter.

3 LA PLATA

55km (34 miles) S of Buenos Aires

La Plata began its history with the unification of Argentina in 1880. The new nation's leaders decided that if Buenos Aires was to be the capital of the new country, then Buenos Aires province needed a new capital of its own. Thus was born La Plata, south of Buenos Aires along the Río de la Plata. Construction began in 1882. Many residents in La Plata claim it is the first planned city in Argentina, but this is a somewhat misleading claim considering how many cities the Spanish built long before La Plata was even a blueprint. The city is, however, the first planned city in unified Argentina, created after independence from Spain. Part of what will strike you about this metropolis is the large number of parks and plazas, as well as its diagonal streets that cut across the city, creating vista points and complex, confusing intersections. This urban pattern earned La Plata the nickname "The Checkerboard City." The town is centered on the enormous Plaza Moreno, defined by the cathedral and municipal palace that face each other across this vast grassy expanse. The city is also a quintessential college town, and home to the Universidad Nacional de La Plata (www.unlp.edu.ar), which has about 75,000 students, a

very visible portion of the city's population. During the 1976-to-1982 Dirty War, many of its left-leaning students were targeted by the military dictatorship and disappeared. Today the school adds a young, casual vibe to the city.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE You can reach La Plata by car, bus, or train. The highway, simply known as the **Autopista,** that begins at the southern end of Avenida 9 de Julio in Buenos Aires connects the capital to La Plata. By car, the trip takes 45 minutes to an hour. Buses between Buenos Aires and La Plata leave the capital from **Retiro** and arrive at the **La Plata Terminal de Omnibus** at the intersections of Diagonal 74 and avenidas 4 and 42 (✆ **221/421-0992**). The main company serving La Plata is **Costera Metropolitana,** which also owns **Chevallier** (✆ **0800/222-6565**). The ride can last from 1 to 2 hours, depending on traffic or whether the bus is a local or an Autopista express. Buses generally run about every 10 minutes, and tickets are roughly $5 (£3.40) round-trip. A train also connects La Plata with Buenos Aires from **Constitución,** in the southern part of the capital, with **Estación La Plata** at the intersection of avenidas 1 and 44. Ticket prices are similar to bus fares. Trains run about every 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the day, and take about an hour and 20 minutes. However, the trains connecting La Plata and Buenos Aires have a high pickpocketing rate, and I don't recommend them for visitors. In Buenos Aires, call ✆ **11/1959-0800** for train tickets; in La Plata, call ✆ **221/423-2575.**

VISITOR INFORMATION There are two **Centros de Información Turística** in La Plata. One is in the Terminal de Omnibus, at the intersections of Diagonal 74 and avenidas 4 and 42, open daily 9am to 5pm (✆ **221/427-3198**). The main center, open only on weekdays from 9am to 5pm, is in a building called the **Palacio Campodónico,** at the intersection of Diagonal 79 and avenidas 5 and 56 (✆ **221/422-9764**). You can also visit www.laplata.gov.ar for more information about the city.

GETTING AROUND La Plata is a relatively compact city, and most of what you'll want to see will be about a 15-minute walk from either the train or bus station. However, you may want to take a taxi to a few points in the suburbs, including the **República de los Niños** amusement park. Cabs are easy to find at the bus and train stations and all over town, but if you need to call one, try the 24-hour company **Remises Horizonte** (✆ **221/453-2800**). La Plata's streets are numbered according to a grid pattern with overlaying diagonals. Depending on the map or the person with whom you are speaking, the streets are either *calles* or *avenidas,* and the terms are used interchangeably, which can become confusing. The saving grace is that no street number is used twice for streets and avenues (as in 8th St. and Eighth Ave. in Manhattan). Portions of **Calle 8** are now a pedestrianized shopping street—a good place to stop for ice cream or a drink at any of the numerous cafes in the vicinity.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

The city's most imposing building, the **Catedral de la Inmaculada Concepción,** at avenidas 14, 51, and 52 (✆ **221/427-3504**), hovers over the **Plaza Moreno** in the center of the city. It was built in a medieval Gothic style more along the lines of a northern European church than a Spanish colonial one. It is free for visits, but you'll have to pay to get a little closer to heaven at the lookout tower in one of the spires, known as the **Torre de Jesús (Jesus Tower);** it costs about $2 (£1.35) to climb. Across the plaza, the architecture of the **Palacio Municipal** warrants a look, at Avenida 12, between avenidas 51 and 53. The **City Park (Paseo del Bosque),** on the edge of the center of town, is

home to the **Museo de Ciencias Naturales** (✆ **221/425-7744;** www.fcnym.unlp.edu.ar; admission $3/£2; Tues–Sun 10am–6pm). This museum is affiliated with the National University and has the feel of an old Victorian institution, with its mix of stuffed animals, archaeological relics, and other items displayed in the building's dusty, soaring, wrought-iron interior. Nearby in the park, the **City Zoo** (✆ **221/427-3925;** www.jardinzoologico.laplata.gov.ar; admission $3/£2 adults, free for children; Tues–Sun 9am–6pm), shelters more than 180 kinds of animals. The **Teatro Nuevo Argentino,** Avenida 51, at avenidas 9 and 10 (✆ **221/429-1700** and 221/429-1745), stages various productions and exhibits paintings and other art in its lobby. Built into an old train station, the enormous **Dardo Rocha Cultural Center,** on Avenida 50, at avenidas 6 and 7 (✆ **221/427-2101;** www.cultura.laplata.gov.ar for all institutions), houses the **Contemporary Art Museum** and the **Municipal Art Museum,** among many other institutions and an art cafe. Hours and admission fees vary depending on the venue, but the place is always busy with something to do. A few miles from downtown is the amusement park, complete with a magic castle, that inspired Walt Disney when he created Disneyland in California. Juan and Evita Perón built the **República de los Niños,** at Belgrano and Calle 501 (✆ **221/484-1409;** www.republica.laplata.gov.ar), as a learning and entertainment center for children. Many of the small-size buildings imitate government buildings in Buenos Aires, with themes related to various nations. Naturally, the rides and attractions make the place a great stop for kids.

City Tours

The travel company **For Export,** Calle 5 no. 1241, between avenidas 57 and 58 (✆ **221/425-9393;** www.forexport.net.ar), offers city tours in La Plata. Various themes include the Panoramic City Tour, which lasts half a day; the Full Day City Tour; and the Religious City Tour. They also arrange excursions outside of the city, hotel accommodations, and car rentals.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel del Rey An Argentine-owned three-star property, the Hotel del Rey is a bargain considering its location and services. Rooms are of an average size; those on the upper floors come with nice views of the surrounding parts of the city. The hotel maintains its own full-service travel agency called Viajes del Rey, in the lobby, which makes it easy to arrange excursions (✆ **221/427-0177;** www.viajesdelrey.com.ar).

Plaza Paso 180 (at avs. 13 and 44), 1900 La Plata. ✆ **221/427-0177.** www.hoteldelrey.com.ar. 40 units. From $57 (£39) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, minibar.

Inn Corregidor A few blocks off Plaza Moreno, this hotel is very well situated near many of La Plata's government buildings and tourist sites. Most rooms have a light, airy feeling to them. There is a small health center on the premises. The hotel was previously a Howard Johnson hotel and may be described by locals that way, but it is now independent from the chain.

Calle 6 no. 1026 (at avs. 53 and 54), 1900 La Plata. ✆ **221/425-6800.** Fax 221/425-6805. www.hotelcorregidor.com.ar. 110 units (109 doubles, 1 apt). From $93 (£63) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; health club; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

WHERE TO DINE

Hook ARGENTINE/IRISH/SEAFOOD With a vague pirate-and-shipwreck theme, Hook is a restaurant/pub with very friendly staffers who like to chat with patrons at the bar. Seafood as well as Irish and Argentine items are the main draws here. During the lunch hours, they also have an inexpensive Executive menu, which is a bargain at about $8 to $10 (£5.40–£6.80).

Av. 53 no. 538, btw. avs. 5 and 6. ✆ **221/482-2160.** www.hooklp.com.ar. Main courses $3–$8 (£2–£5.40). No credit cards. Mon–Sat 8am–2am; Sun 8pm–2am.

Restaurant Modelo ARGENTINE/ITALIAN You won't find any models lurking around here, as the name of the place might imply. You will find professional service and high-quality food in an interior that looks more English than Argentine in what is known as the oldest restaurant in the city. At night, the bar becomes the focus, filling up with a young crowd drinking beer, shelling peanuts, and throwing the remains all over the floor.

Calle 5, at Av. 54. ✆ **221/421-1321.** Main courses $3–$7 (£2–£4.75). No credit cards. Daily 8am–3am.

4 TIGRE & THE DELTA

36km (22 miles) NE of Buenos Aires

The Tigre River Delta is in essence a wild natural suburb of Buenos Aires, but it seems a world apart from the city. The delta is formed by the confluence of five rivers, where they flow from the Pampas into the Río de la Plata. This marshy complex is full of silt and hundreds of tiny islands. Over time, it's continuing to grow down the Río de la Plata. The delta area has grown considerably since the Spanish Conquest. In theory, within several hundred years, the Río Tigre Delta will actually reach the capital. The islands here are a mix of grassland, swamp, and true forest, with a variety of animal and plant life.

The development of the Tigre Delta into a resort area owes to two concurrent historical circumstances in Buenos Aires in the 1870s. One was the construction of railroads from Buenos Aires into the rest of the country. The other was the 1877 outbreak of yellow fever, which caused wealthy Porteños to seek out new parts of the city for new year-round homes as well as summer vacation spots. The English were in charge of much of the construction here, so many of the older neo-Gothic and mock-Tudor mansions and bed-and-breakfasts that line the banks of the river passages look like Victorian London buildings transplanted into the wild marshes of the Pampas.

Today, many Porteños come here on weekends to relax, ride horseback, hike, fish, swim, or do nothing at all. It's also a convenient destination for tourists, since it's easy to come here just for the day, tour the islands by boat, and return to Buenos Aires in time for dinner. There is a year-round population of residents on these car-free inner islands, and they go to school, work, and shop for groceries using a system of boats and docks.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The Tigre Delta is best reached by train from Buenos Aires and then a boat or launch from the train station. Trains from Buenos Aires leave from **Estación Retiro** for Estación Tigre, at Avenida Naciones Unidas, every 10 to 20 minutes along the Mitre Line. Tickets run about $3 (£2) round-trip. Call ✆ **11/4317-4445** for schedules and information, or visit www.tbanet.com.ar. Within Tigre, the **Estación Fluvial Tigre,** where the boats depart to head through the various rivers and islands, is

on the next block over from **Estación Tigre,** at Mitre 305. Many companies run launches and services on both banks of the river here; you have to know where you want to go, or simply choose one and go wherever it takes you. Among the many companies are **Catamaranes Interisleña** (✆ **11/4731-0261**); **Líneas Delta** (✆ **11/4749-0537**); and **Catamaranes Río Tur** (✆ **11/4731-0280**). To reach **Martín García Island,** one of the most remote parts of the delta, you have to travel with **Cacciola** (✆ **11/4749-0329**). Most of these companies service the various islands but allow you to ride on the boat until the end of the trip and then simply return. Ticket prices vary but range from less than $1 (70p) and up. I highly recommend that you find out when the last few boats leave from your destination; toward the end of the day, boats can fill up quickly, leaving some passengers to wait for the next boat. Extra boats are dispatched at peak times, but you still may have to wait a few extra hours at the end of the day, especially on Sunday. Build this time into your plans or you may literally get stuck in the mud. Many tour companies in Buenos Aires also provide excursions to the Tigre Delta, and I have included that information below.

VISITOR INFORMATION In theory, there are two **Centros de Información Turística** in Tigre. There is one in Estación Tigre, but it never seems to be open. Within Estación Fluvial Tigre, at Mitre 305 (✆ **0800/888-TIGRE** [84473] or 11/4512-4497; www.tigre.gov.ar), another office is open daily from 8am to 8pm. It is a very busy office, providing information on the islands, hotels and rentable bungalows, and other activities. You may have to wait a little while for help, but most of the staff speaks English. Another useful tourism website is www.puntodelta.com.ar.

GETTING AROUND Within the town of Tigre itself, where both the train station and the docks are, one can easily walk along both banks. There are restaurants, playgrounds for children, and a few tourist-oriented shops along the waterfront and on the streets heading to the Puerto de Frutos (see below). To get around and see the delta, however, you will need a boat. I have listed the companies that provide these services above. Of course, if you have the skills and stamina, swimming is another option.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

The main thing to see in Tigre is the delta itself and the various islands and resorts that dot the area. Within the town of Tigre, where the train station and boat docks are, there are a few services and various other places of interest. Many people simply stay in this area and dine in the restaurants, sunbathe along the shoreline, or wander the town. Ponies march up and down the eastern shoreline in the city center, near the intersection of calles Lavalle and Fernández (no address or phone); children love riding them. From this area, head along what is called **Paseo Victórica,** a collection of Victorian mansions along the waterfront of Río Lujan, until it intersects with Río Conquista. This is one of the prettiest parts of Tigre, and you will find many people sunbathing along the shore here. In the midst of all this Victorian splendor is the **Naval Museum,** Paseo Victorica 602, at Martínez (✆ **11/4749-0608**). On the other bank, across from here, is the **Parque de la Costa,** Vivanco, at Montes de Oca (✆ **11/4732-6000**), full of rides for kids and grown-ups. Just outside of the center of Tigre is the famous **Puerto de Frutos** (✆ **11/4512-4493**), at Calle Sarmiento 160, along Río Lujan. Fruit farming was integral to the early development of the Tigre Delta, and this market is a leftover from those days. Most people rave about seeing this site, but in general, I have always found it disappointing, with almost no fruit. Besides the traditional basket weavers who create their wares using the reeds growing in the delta, the market is now mostly full of odds and ends and

less interesting crafts that can be found in many places. Still, it is worth a quick visit. Definitely worth a visit, however, is the **Museo Municipal de Bellas Artes,** Paseo Victorica 972 (✆ **11/4512-4528**), built into what had been the Tigre Casino. The building is among the most impressive Argentine Beaux Arts buildings outside of Buenos Aires and took years to restore. The redesign of the casino as a museum was done by Gabriel Miremont, the curator of the Museo Evita and numerous museums throughout Argentina. The museum has free admission and is open Wednesday to Friday 9am to 7pm, and Saturday and Sunday noon to 7pm.

A 3-hour boat ride each way from the center of Tigre will take you to **Martín García Island.** It is famous for its upscale political prison, where various Argentine presidents, including Juan Perón, have been incarcerated, but exploring here will take a full day once you account for the round-trip boat ride.

If you are doing any trekking on the islands, even in hot weather, you will need hiking boots, long pants, and long-sleeved shirts. Saw grass and other very sharp plants inhabit the area and will rip into unprotected skin. You should also bring mosquito repellent, though malaria is not a problem in the Delta, only painful itching. It's also a good idea to pack binoculars, to view birds and other wildlife.

Excursion Companies Serving Tigre Delta

Various travel companies in Buenos Aires provide day-trip excursions to the Río Tigre delta or will arrange longer stays in the numerous bed-and-breakfasts, bungalows, and adventure lodges in the area. **Say Hueque Tourism,** with two locations (Viamonte 749, Office 601, 1053 Buenos Aires, ✆ **11/5199-2517;** Guatemala 4845, Office 4, 1425 Buenos Aires, ✆ **11/4775-7862;** www.sayhueque.com), is one that I highly recommend, especially for longer trips and adventure excursions to see the natural beauty of the area. **Travel Line** (✆ **11/4393-9000;** www.travelline.com.ar) offers Tigre Delta day tours, among many other excursions. The full-day Tigre tours are Sundays only (ask for an English-speaking guide), and include lunch, a ride to and from Tigre by train, and a boat ride among the rivers of the Tigre delta for about $65 (£44) per person.

WHERE TO STAY

Bonanza Deltaventura ★★ If you want to get away from it all, head to this hotel on one of the islands in the Río Tigre delta. It has miles of walkways through the grasslands for bird-watching and horses for riding along the shoreline. Or you can just swim off the dock out front. Guests can rent four small but comfortable rooms as either singles or doubles, for a total of eight people in the lodge. The living style is communal, with shared bathrooms and kitchen. The price is for 2 days and 1 night and includes meals and excursions, but alcoholic drinks cost extra. The staff also speaks English. You will need to call ahead of time to stay here, to ensure that space is available and that you take the right boat company. The hotel is on the Carapachay River islands section of the delta, about a 1-hour boat ride from the center of the town of Tigre.

Carapachay River Islands, 1648 Tigre. ✆ **11/4728-1674** or 11/15-5603-7176 (cell). www.deltaventura.com. 4 units for up to 8 people. From $106 (£72) a person, including all meals (no alcohol) and trekking. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Shared kitchen; horses; trekking.

Casona La Ruchi ★★ This charming bed-and-breakfast overlooks the waterfront across the bank from the Estación Fluvial. Owners Dora and Jorge Escuariza and their children run the place, treating guests who stay in the six-room, 1893 mansion like family. In the back, guests can gather and barbecue at the pool and grill. Rooms are furnished with quaint Victorian antiques, and some have windows looking out onto the waterfront.

The place is open year-round, but it's busiest during summer weekends. Guests have 24-hour access to the hotel, though the family does not have an actual overnight staff person. Call if you're arriving late in the day to verify that someone can let you in. You will enjoy the warmth and hospitality at this place. Some rooms share a bathroom, and the owners recently installed Wi-Fi.

Lavalle 557 (at Av. Libertador), 1648 Tigre. ✆ **11/4749-2499.** www.casonalaruchi.com.ar. 6 units, some with shared bathroom. $55 (£37) double. Rates include continental breakfast. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; use of kitchen and backyard grill; Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE

Don Emilio Parrilla ARGENTINE/PARRILLA A rustic interior and a casual atmosphere with tables in bright Provençal yellow await you in this *parrilla* overlooking the waterfront. The food here is great, and a complete meal will run you about $10 (£6.80) a person. Unfortunately, it's only open on weekends.

Lavalle 573, at Av. Libertador. ✆ **11/4631-8804.** Main courses $3–$6 (£2–£4.05). No credit cards. Fri 8pm–1am; Sat–Sun 11:30am–5pm and 8pm–2am.

El Moño Rojo ★ ARGENTINE/INTERNATIONAL An enormous restaurant complex overlooking the waterfront near the Estación Fluvial, this is one of the best places to come for a meal with entertainment. The atmosphere is brilliantly red, festive, and very kitschy, full of posters of tango stars, pictures of Argentine actors and actresses, and old Peronist memorabilia. On Friday they stage a tango show. The food is a mixture of pizzas, snacks, sandwiches, and traditional *parrilla* grilled meat, so there should be something to please everyone here.

Av. Mitre 345, at Estación Fluvial Tigre. ✆ **11/15-5644-8058** (cell). Main courses $4–$7 (£2.70–£4.75). No credit cards. Daily 8am–2am.

La Terraza ★ ARGENTINE/INTERNATIONAL This two-level restaurant looks like it was dropped in from a tropical island, with its wraparound verandas and palm tree overhangs. A full *parrilla* offers some of the best steak dining in Tigre. You'll also find chicken, salads, and Italian cuisine. There is a beautiful view to the Rio Lujan while dining here.

Paseo Victoria 134, at Colon Tigre. ✆ **11/4731-2916.** www.laterrazatigre.com.ar. Main courses $4–$7 (£2.70–£4.75). No credit cards. Tues–Sun noon–5pm; Fri–Sat 8pm–1am (sometimes later).

5 COLONIA DEL SACRAMENTO, URUGUAY

140km (87 miles) W of Buenos Aires

The tiny gem of Colonia del Sacramento, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, appears untouched by time. Dating from 1680, when it was established by Manuel Lobo as a buffer colony by the Portuguese against the Spanish, the old city boasts beautifully preserved colonial artistry down its quiet, bougainvillea-draped, cobblestone streets. A leisurely stroll into the **Barrio Historico (Historic Neighborhood)** leads you under flower-laden windowsills to churches dating from the 1680s, past simple single-story homes—from Colonia's time as a colonial settlement—and on to local museums detailing the riches of the town's past. The Barrio Historico contains brilliant examples of colonial architecture and many of Uruguay's oldest structures. A mix of lovely shops, tiny *posadas,* and delicious cafes and restaurants makes the town more than a history lesson.

The majority of visitors take day trips to Colonia from Buenos Aires. However, staying overnight or exploring the region has certain advantages. Colonia is surrounded by wineries and *estancias* and some of Uruguay's most beautiful landscapes, as well as spa resorts. Only recently experiencing a tourism boom, many of these sites have a more authentic atmosphere than their counterparts in Argentina. As small as it is, overnighting in Colonia allows you to have the town to yourself, after the day-trippers have left, to wander the cobblestone streets unencumbered. Photography buffs in particular will find this delightful. For those who come as a couple, the small town is serenely romantic for watching a sunset together and then heading to candlelit restaurants serving steaks, locally caught fish, and wines from the surrounding vineyards.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

The easiest way to reach Colonia from Buenos Aires is by **ferry. FerryLíneas** (✆ **02/900-6617**) runs a fast boat that arrives in 45 minutes. **Buquebús** (✆ **02/916-1910**) also offers two classes of service. Prices range from $35 to $58 (£24–£39) each way. A new ferryboat-and-bus combination service opened in 2006 to compete with what had been a monopoly for Buquebús. **Colonia Express** (in Buenos Aires ✆ **54/11-4313-5100;** in Montevideo ✆ 02/901-9597; www.coloniaexpress.com) offers similar prices but a less frequent schedule.

Colonia is a good stopping-off point if you're traveling between Buenos Aires and Montevideo. **COT** (✆ **02/409-4949** in Montevideo) offers **bus service** from Montevideo and from Punta del Este.

Visitor Information

The main **Oficina de Turismo,** General Flores and Rivera (✆ **052/23700** or 052/26141), is open daily from 8am to 8pm. Just outside the gates to the Barrio Historico, and with the same hours, is a smaller **Oficina de Turismo,** Calle Manuel Lobo 224, between Ituzaingó and Paseo San Miguel (✆ **052/28506**). Speak with someone at the tourism office to arrange a guided tour of the town, or contact the **Asociacion de Guias Profesionales de Turismo del Departmento de Colonia** (✆ **052/22309** or 052/25068; asociacionguiascolonia@gmail.com). Visit www.colonia.gub.uy or www.uruguaynatural.com for information about Colonia and the surrounding region. The website www.guiacolonia.com.uy has useful information, and keep an eye out for the bimonthly booklet **Güear** (www.guear.com), which has shopping, restaurant, hotel, and nightlife listings, as well as profiles of local chefs and other information. A PDF of the booklet can be downloaded before your visit. Most locations listed here take Argentine pesos, Uruguayan pesos, euros, and U.S. dollars.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

A Walk Through Colonia's Barrio Histórico

Your visit to Colonia will be concentrated in the **Barrio Historico (Old Neighborhood),** located on the coast, at the far southwestern corner of town. The sites, which are all within a few blocks of each other, can easily be visited on foot within a few hours. Museums and tourist sites are open Thursday through Monday from 11:15am to 4:45pm. For about $2 (£1.35), you can buy a pass at the Portuguese or municipal museums, which will get you into all the sites. Many locations in Colonia don't have real addresses, but often an intersection of two streets is used for direction. Individual museums don't have phone numbers either, so make sure to get a map at the tourist office.

While the town is small and convenient for walking, almost nothing in the center of Colonia is handicap accessible. It is a difficult visit for anyone in a wheelchair, except to see the exteriors of important structures.

Start your tour at **Plaza Mayor,** the principal square that served as the center of the colonial establishment. To explore Colonia's Portuguese history, cross the Calle Manuel Lobo on the southeastern side of the plaza and enter the **Museo Portugués (Portuguese Museum),** which exhibits European customs and traditions that influenced the town's beginnings. Its most important holding is the final Portuguese royal medallion to grace the city walls before the city finally fell into Spanish hands. Leading behind the Museo Municipal is the **Street of Sighs,** or the **Calle de Los Suspiros,** so called because it was where the prostitutes worked their trade in olden days, when the military barracks were just off the Plaza Mayor. It remains the most intact colonial street in the city, with its angled cobblestone drain leading to the water front. You also see side by side the difference between Portuguese and Spanish colonial construction. If the roof is flat, it is Spanish. If the roof is angled with tiles, it is Portuguese. Nearby are the **Ruinas Convento San Francisco (San Francisco convent ruins).** Dating from 1696, the San Francisco convent was once inhabited by Jesuit and Franciscan monks, two brotherhoods dedicated to preaching the gospel to indigenous people. You can crawl over the ruins, or climb the adjacent 100-foot-high **Faro** or **Lighthouse** after paying the $1 (70p) fee. The wind is strong up there and gives a view to Buenos Aires on a clear day. The lighthouse is open daily from 10am to 8pm and is overseen by the Uruguayan navy, which has a small base just off Plaza Mayor.

Around the corner is the **Casa de Brown (Brown House),** which houses the **Museo Municipal (Municipal Museum).** Here, you will find an impressive collection of colonial documents and artifacts, a must-see for history buffs. For those with a more artistic bent, make sure to check out the **Museo del Azulejo (Tile Museum),** close to the waterfront on Calle Misiones de los Tapes at Paseo de San Gabriel, a unique museum of 19th-century European and Uruguayan tiles housed in a gorgeous 300-year-old country house. Upon exiting the museum, turn right for a walk along the water and then make a right onto Calle de la Playa, enjoying the shops and cafes along the way, heading up to the **Iglesia Matriz,** originally dating from 1680. Fighting meant the church was reconstructed several times, and today's building is a mix of colonial and neoclassical styles. To the side of the church is **Plaza de Lobo,** with its excavated **Ruinas Casa del Gobernador (House of the Viceroy Ruins),** built by the Portuguese and destroyed in 1777 by the Spanish. The House of the Viceroy captures something of the city's 17th- and 18th-century magistrates, when the port was used for imports, exports, and smuggling. Complete your walk by heading back toward the Plaza Mayor. To the left, you'll see the **City Gate** or **Portón de Campo** and what remains of the ramparts that once served to protect the city. Climbing them and contemplating, while looking out to the Río de la Plata and the world beyond, will help you understand that in spite of its tiny size, Colonia played a pivotal role in the global struggle between two European empires to dominate a continent an ocean away.

WHERE TO STAY

Colonia

Hotel La Misión This hotel overlooking the Plaza Mayor was partly renovated in 2008, adding new bathrooms and rooms that mix modern and traditional. An antiques-filled lobby leads to a small courtyard dripping with bougainvillea. The original building dates from 1762.

Misiones de los Tapes 171, CP 70000, Colonia. ✆ **052/26767.** www.lamisionhotel.com. 11 units. From $100 (£68) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; concierge; business center; room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, minibar.

Posada Plaza Mayor Among the most charming accommodations in the center, this hotel has several rooms that wrap around a tranquil central courtyard with a fountain. Rooms are a mix of modern and rustic, and the breakfast room has a spectacular view over the Río de la Plata.

Calle de Comercio 111, CP 70000, Colonia. ✆ **052/23193.** www.posadaplazamayor.com. 15 units. From $110 (£74) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; concierge; business center; room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer.

Outside Colonia

Four Seasons Carmelo ★★ One of the most luxurious and award-winning resorts in South America, the Four Seasons Carmelo is about 90km (54 miles) from the center of Colonia, set on the Río de la Plata. The enormous rooms and suites, about 1,000 to 1,300 square feet and with fireplaces and cathedral ceilings, are set in individual bungalows in a landscaped garden surrounding the pool, making for a romantic getaway or honeymoon spot. The spa offers extensive treatments in a calming Asian-inspired setting. There are also a golf course, polo grounds, and other amenities as well as special children's programs. It takes about an hour to drive there from Colonia, and the hotel also runs a shuttle service from Colonia's port, for $88 (£60) one-way and $132 to $410 (£89–£278) round-trip, per person.

Ruta 21, Km 262, CP 70000, Carmelo. ✆ **0542/9000.** Fax 0542/9999. www.fourseasons.com. 44 units with 24 dual-level suites. From $435 (£295) double; $455 (£308) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; indoor pool; outdoor pool; golf course; deluxe health club w/fitness center; spa; sauna; children's center, concierge; car-rental desk; business center; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; polo grounds. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Sheraton Colonia ★★ Opened in 2005, the Sheraton Colonia is a 10-minute cab ride from the center of town. Built over a golf course, with a view to the Río de la Plata, it's a family-friendly, resort-style option if you want to spend more time in the area. The pool cascades over several levels in a landscaped garden, and is spectacular at sunset. A lobby restaurant serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and dinner is also available at the golf clubhouse, set in the gardens. The gym and health club area is large, with new equipment and enormous glass windows overlooking the river. The large spa has 18 treatment rooms, and offers a romantic champagne whirlpool treatment for couples, among many other options. Some suites come with kitchens.

Continuación de la Rambla de Las Américas s/n, CP 70000, Carmelo. ✆ **052/29000.** Fax 052/29001. www.sheraton.com. 92 units. From $265 (£179) double; from $380 (£257) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; golf course; indoor pool; outdoor pool; deluxe health club w/fitness center; spa; sauna; children's center; concierge; car-rental desk; business center; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchen (in some suites), minibar, hair dryer, safe.

WHERE TO DINE

El Drugstore ★ URUGUAYAN/JAPANESE/SEAFOOD This restaurant is across from Iglesia Matriz and owned by Argentine Guillermo Azulay, who says, "I want to do something that makes people happy." It has a colorful, kitschy interior with posters, bric-a-brac, and polka dot tablecloths. Its most unusual feature is an antique car parked outside, converted into a dining area. Traditional *chivitos,* fish, steak, pastas, and Japanese

food are on the menu. Live music, an Executive Menu for $15 (£10), and an open kitchen make this an interesting place to dine.

Vasconcellos 179, at Portugal, across from Iglesia Matriz. ✆ **052/25241.** Main courses $3–$12 (£2–£8.20). No credit cards. Daily noon–midnight.

Lobo ★ URUGUAYAN/FRENCH/INTERNATIONAL This restaurant is a mix of old and new, formal and casual. Head chef Nicolas Diaz Ibarguren previously worked at the Alvear Palace in Buenos Aires, and offers some of the most creative dishes in Colonia, such as carpaccio, leek-and-bacon ravioli, and gourmet *chivitos* at surprisingly reasonable prices. There's live music on weekends.

Calle de Comercio, at La Playa. ✆ **052/29245.** www.loborestaurante.com. Main courses $6–$8 (£4.05–£5.40). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 12:15pm–midnight.

Mesón de la Plaza ★ URUGUAYAN Among the most traditional and elegant spots in Colonia, this location serves fine steaks and Uruguayan cuisine. It's located in a large colonial building with high ceilings, across from Iglesia Matriz.

Vasconcellos 153, at Portugal. ✆ **052/24807.** Main courses $6–$15 (£4.05–£10). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight.

Pulpería de los Faroles ★ URUGUAYAN Waiters with vests add formality to this old institution, with ancient brick walls offset by pastel tablecloths. Traditional food includes locally caught fish, steak, and pasta.

Calle Misiones de los Tapes 101 at Comercio, on the Plaza Mayor. ✆ **052/25399.** Main courses $8–$15 (£5.40–£10). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight.

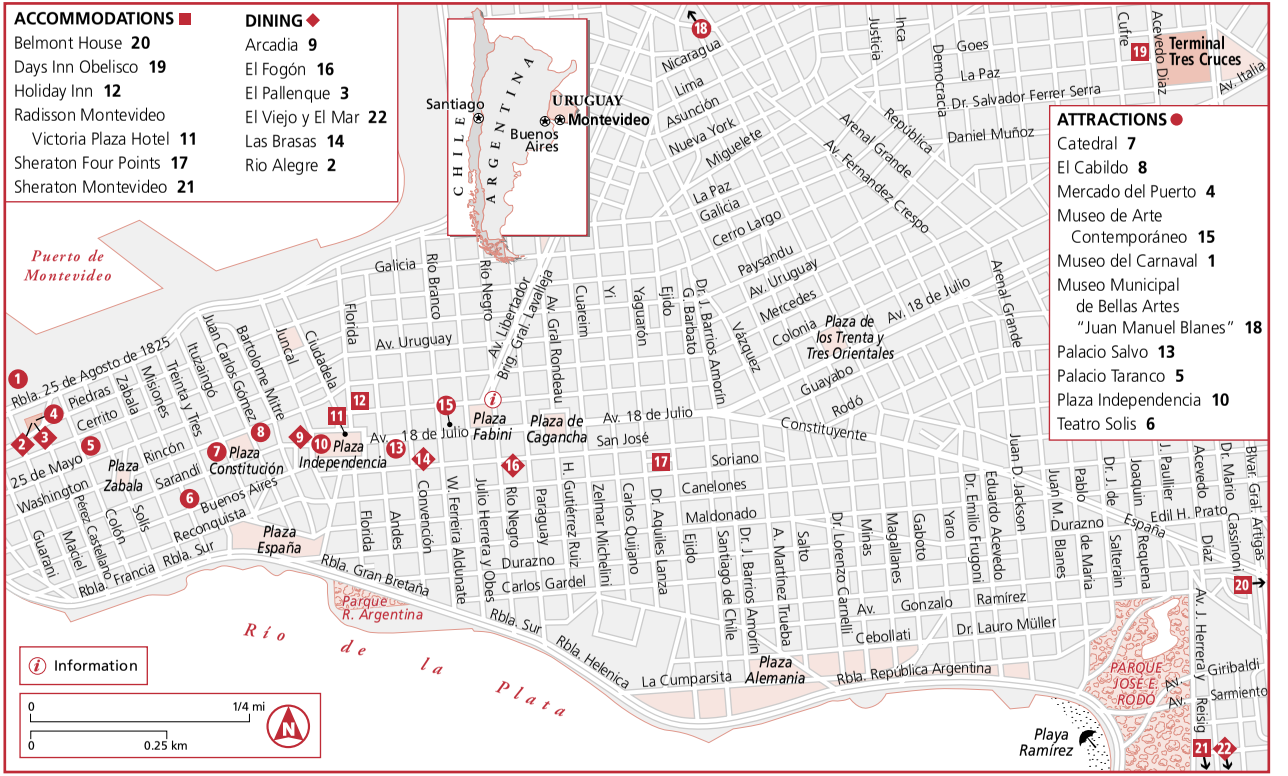
COLONIA AFTER DARK

Believe it or not, there is nightlife in Colonia, whether it's locals partying after work, or tourists staying in the local *posadas* and the surrounding spa-hotels. Bar life begins at 10 or 11pm, but for serious dancing, expect things to get started after 1am. With its white leather lounges and blue-neon backlit bar, **Mar Dulce Resto Pub,** at Virrey Cevallo 232 and General Flores (✆ **098/500898** [cell]), looks like it was plucked from Miami Beach, and offers live music, DJs, and dancing. **Patrimonio,** at Calle de San Jose 111, at España (✆ **099/187911** [cell]; www.patrimonioloungebar.com), offers live rock and jazz, and a spectacular back patio that cascades over the Río de La Plata. **Tresquarto** at Av. Méndez 295 (✆ **052/29664** or **099/523043** [cell]; www.trescuarto.com), is the town's mega-disco, a four-level venue with three different kinds of music, hence the name. It's open only on Fridays and Saturdays.

6 MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY

215km (133 miles) E of Buenos Aires

Montevideo, the southernmost capital on the continent, along with its suburbs, is home to half of Uruguay's population of three million people. On the banks of the Río de la Plata, Montevideo first existed as a fortress of the Spanish Empire and developed into a major port city in the mid–18th century. European immigrants—including Spanish, Portuguese, French, and British—have influenced the city's architecture. A walk around the capital reveals architectural styles ranging from colonial to Art Deco.


ACCOMMODATIONS
Belmont House 20
Days Inn Obelisco 19
Holiday Inn 12
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Sheraton Four Points 17
Sheraton Montevideo 21
DINING
Arcadia 9
El Fogón 16
El Pallenque 3
El Viejo y El Mar 22
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ATTRACTIONS
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Mercado del Puerto 4
Museo de Arte Contemporáneo 15
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Teatro Solis 6
CHILE
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URUGUAY
Santiago
Montevideo
Buenos Aires
Puerto de Montevideo
Río de la Plata
Parque R. Argentina
PARQUE JOSÉ E. RODÓ
Plaza España
Plaza Fabini
Plaza de Cagancha
Plaza Alemania
Playa Ramírez
Terminal Tres Cruces
Information
0 1/4 mi
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Although Montevideo has few must-see attractions, its charm lies in wait for the observant traveler. A walk along La Rambla, stretching from the Old City to the neighborhood of Carrasco, takes you along the riverfront, past fishermen and their catch, to parks and gardens where children play and elders sip *mate* (a tealike beverage). Restaurants, cafes, bars, and street performers populate the port area, where you will also discover the flavors of Uruguay at the afternoon and weekend Mercado del Puerto (Port Market). Many of the city's historic sites surround Plaza Independencia and can be visited in a few hours.

If you're visiting the city as a side trip to Buenos Aires, ignore the warning of Porteños that there is nothing to see and do. It's true the Argentine capital is larger and more active, but Montevideo has its own laid-back charms. The best way for English speakers to understand the relationship between Montevideo and Buenos Aires, and by extension of the countries themselves, is to think of the relationship of Canada to the United States, Ireland to the United Kingdom, or New Zealand to Australia. Both Uruguay and Argentina have similar histories, languages, and cultures, but the smaller one has always had to live in the other's shadow, dominated politically and culturally. This has resulted in a certain self-consciousness for Uruguayans when dealing with visitors, who come knowing little or nothing about the country. Knowing you might be visiting as a side trip from a place that likes to throw its weight around, Montevideans reach out to welcome visitors and make sure you have a good time in their city to counter whatever Argentines have told you.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

International flights and those from Buenos Aires land at **Carrasco International Airport** (✆ **02/604-0386**), located 19km (12 miles) from downtown Montevideo. Uruguay's national carrier is **Pluna,** Colonia and Julio Herrera (✆ **0800/118-811** or 02/604-4080, or 11/4342-4420 in Buenos Aires; www.pluna.com.uy), which operates several flights daily from Aeroparque. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (✆ **02/901-9466**) connects both Aeroparque and Ezeiza with Montevideo; the flight takes 50 minutes. The fare ranges between $150 and $250 (£102–£169) round-trip, depending on how far in advance you make reservations. In 2009, **American Airlines** (✆ **800/433-7300** in the United States and Canada, or 02/916-3929 in Montevideo; www.aa.com) began direct service from Miami to Montevideo—with frequency varying by season—in addition to its already existing flights, which connect to Montevideo with stopovers in Buenos Aires.

A taxi, or *remise* (private, unmetered taxi), from the airport to downtown costs about $15 (£10).

BY BOAT OR HYDROFOIL The most popular way to get to Montevideo is by ferry. **Buquebús,** Calle Río Negro 1400 (✆ **02/916-8801;** www.buquebus.com), operates three to four hydrofoils per day from Buenos Aires; the trip takes about 3 hours and costs about $150 (£102) round-trip. Montevideo's port is about 1.5km (1 mile) from downtown.

BY BUS **Terminal Omnibus Tres Cruces,** General Artigas 1825 (✆ **02/409-7399** or 02/401-8998), is Montevideo's long-distance bus terminal, connecting the capital with cities in Uruguay and throughout South America. Buses to Buenos Aires take about 8 hours. **COT** (✆ **02/409-4949**) offers the best service to Punta del Este, Maldonado, and Colonia.

Orientation

Montevideo is surrounded by water on three sides, a testament to its earlier incarnation as an easily defended fortress for the Spanish Empire. The Old City begins near the western edge of Montevideo, found on the skinny portion of a peninsula between the Rambla Gran Bretaña and the city's main artery, Avenida 18 de Julio, named for the date the new constitution was adopted. Look for Plaza Independencia and Plaza Constitución to find the center of the district. Many of the city's museums, theaters, and hotels reside in this historic area, although a trip east on Avenida 18 de Julio reveals the more modern Montevideo, with its own share of hotels, markets, and monuments. Along the city's long southern coastline runs the Rambla Gran Bretaña, traveling 21km (13 miles) from the piers of the Old City, past Parque Rodó, and on to points south and east, passing fish stalls and street performers along the way.

Getting Around

It's easy to navigate around the center of Montevideo on foot or by bus. Safe, convenient buses crisscross Montevideo, making it easy to venture outside the city center, for 15 Uruguayan pesos (about 60¢/35p). Taxis are safe and relatively inexpensive, but it can be difficult to hail one during rush hour. I recommend calling **Remises Carrasco** (✆ **09/440-5473**). To rent a car, try **Thrifty** (✆ **02/204-3373**). For roadside emergencies or general information on driving in Uruguay, contact the **Automóvil Club de Uruguay,** Av. Libertador 1532 (✆ **02/902-4792**), or the **Centro Automovilista del Uruguay,** E. V. Haedo 2378 (✆ **02/408-2091**).

Visitor Information

Uruguay's **Ministerio de Turismo** is at Av. Libertador 1409, corner of Colonia (✆ **02/908-9105** or 02/1885). It assists travelers with countrywide information, and it's open daily from 8am to 8pm in winter, from 8am to 2pm in summer. There are also branches at Carrasco International Airport (✆ **02/604-0386**); Tres Cruces bus station (✆ **02/409-7399**); and at the port, to greet Buquebus and cruise-ship visitors (Rambla 25 de Agosto de 1825 and Yacaré; ✆ **02/188-5100**), with hours of Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm, and varied hours on weekends, depending on cruise-ship docking schedules. The **municipal tourist office,** Explanada Municipal, inside of the atrium of the Intendencia (or City Hall), at Avenida 18 de Julio, and Ejido (✆ **02/916-8434** or 02/1950), offers city maps and brochures of tourist activities. It's open daily from 10am to 4pm. It also organizes cultural city tours on weekends. Though not officially open to the public, Montevideo's Tourism Office is on the building's third floor and is reachable at ✆ **02/1950-3171.** The city also has a satellite tourism office, usually open Monday to Friday from noon to 7pm, at San Jose 1328 at Ejido (✆ **02/1950-2043**), built into a walkway that is part of the basement of the Sheraton Four Points hotel. It still remains difficult to find English-speaking help in Montevideo's offices. In the event of an emergency, the **Tourist Police** can be reached at ✆ **0800-8226** or 911, and their office is at Colonia 1021. Visit www.presidencia.gub.uy, www.uruguaynatural.com.uy, www.montevideo.gub.uy, or www.turismo.gub.uy for more tourism information. The travel magazine ***Pasaporte Uruguay*** also provides a wealth of information, in English and Spanish, and is available free in some locations, and for sale for about $3 (£2) in others (www.pasaporteuruguay.com).

Tour Companies

In business for more than 50 years, **Buemes Travel Services,** Colonia 979 (✆ **02/902-1050**), is among the largest full-service tour companies in Uruguay. Much of their

business involves planning trips and tours for passengers coming into Montevideo by cruise ship. Contact them for day trips or history tours on various themes or for booking hotels and airline flights. They also arrange trips to other parts of Uruguay, including Colonia, Punta del Este, and the range of *estancias* near Montevideo that only a few foreigners have discovered. One of the best private tour guides in Montevideo is **Tamara Levinson** (✆ **02/710-3312** or 099/696-518; tamaral@montevideo.com.uy), who conducts individual custom tours of Montevideo and other parts of Uruguay. She works for Buemes, but visitors can hire her, in her spare time, to lead individualized travel tours.

Fast Facts Montevideo

Area Code & Phone Numbers The country code for Uruguay is **598;** the city code for Montevideo is **02,** and you drop 0 when dialing from overseas. Land line phones have seven dig its, but many government offices are now using four-, seven-, or eight- digit systems. Ask for clarification with any phone number that seems unusual. Many times these four- and eight- digit numbers do not work properly, so ask for alternative numbers or even a contact's cellphone when given them. Cellphones have a three-digit beginning code, usually beginning with 09—representing the cellphone company—and then six dig its, and do not need an area code in front of them. Drop the 0 also when dialing from overseas. Information is ✆ **122,** or the fee service ✆ **0900-2020.**

ATMs ATMs are plentiful; look for **Bancomat** and **Redbrou** banks. Most have access to the Cirrus network. The PLUS system is harder to find. The ATM at the casino in the Radisson takes everything.

Currency Exchange To exchange money, try **Turisport Limitada** (the local Amex representative), San José 930 (✆ **02/902-0829**); **Gales Casa Cambiaria,** Av. 18 de Julio 1046 (✆ **02/902-0229**); or one of the airport exchanges. About 23 Uruguayan pesos equaled US$1 at the time of this writing.

Hospital The **British Hospital** is located at Av. Italia 2420 (✆ **02/487-1020**) and has emergency-room services.

Internet Access Internet cafes appear and disappear faster than discos, but you won't walk long before coming across one in the city center. Reliable cybercafes include **El Cybercafé,** Calle 25 de Mayo 568; **Arroba del Sur,** Guayabo 1858; and **El Cybercafé Softec,** Santiago de Chile 1286. The average cost is $2 (£1.10) per hour of usage.

Post Office The main post office is at Calle Buenos Aires 451 (✆ **0810/444-CORREO** [267736]), open weekdays from 9am to 6pm.

Safety Although Montevideo remains very safe by big-city standards, street crime has risen in recent years. Travelers should avoid walking alone, particularly at night, in Ciudad Vieja, Avenida 18 de Julio, Plaza Independencia, and the port vicinity. Take a taxi instead. The city has vastly increased the presence of tourism police, particularly in Ciudad Vieja. Look for the men and women with green fluorescent vests.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Catedral ★ Also known as Iglesia Matriz, the cathedral was the city's first public building, erected in 1804. It houses the remains of some of Uruguay's most important political, religious, and economic figures, and it's distinguished by its domed bell towers.

Calle Sarandí at Ituzaingó, overlooking Plaza Constitucion. Free admission. Mon–Fri 8am–8pm.

El Cabildo (Old Town Hall) ★ Uruguay's constitution was signed in the old town hall, which also served as the city's jailhouse in the 19th century. Now a museum, the Cabildo houses the city's historic archives, as well as maps and photos, antiques, costumes, and artwork.

Juan Carlos Gómez 1362, overlooking Plaza Constitucion. ✆ **02/915-9685.** Free admission. Tues–Sun 2:30–7pm.

Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (Museum of Contemporary Art) ★ This museum is dedicated to contemporary Uruguayan art, and it exhibits the country's biggest names. To promote cultural exchange across the region, a section of the museum is set aside for artists who hail from various South American countries.

Av. 18 de Julio 965, 2nd floor. ✆ **02/900-6662.** Free admission. Daily noon–8pm.

Museo Municipal de Bellas Artes "Juan Manuel Blanes" (Municipal Museum of Fine Arts) ★ The national art-history museum displays Uruguayan artistic styles from the nation's inception to the present day. Works include oils, engravings, drawings, sculptures, and documents. Among the great Uruguayan artists exhibited are Juan Manuel Blanes, Pedro Figari, Rafael Barradas, José Cúneo, and Carlos Gonzales.

Av. Millán 4015. ✆ **02/336-2248.** Free admission. Tues–Sun 2–7pm.

Palacio Salvo ★ Often referred to as the symbol of Montevideo, the 26-story Salvo Palace was once the tallest building in South America. It was the work of eccentric Italian architect Mario Palanti, who also designed the very similar structure Palacio Barolo on Buenos Aires's Avenida de Mayo. Though you might expect such an iconic building to be open to the public and have a vista station in its tower, there isn't such a thing. The lobby to this residential tower is, however, open, and periodically has exhibits related to the structure, or on other themes available for free.

Plaza Independencia and Av. 18 de Julio.

Palacio Taranco ★ Now the decorative arts museum, the Taranco Palace was built in the early 20th century and represents the trend toward French architecture during that period. The museum displays Uruguayan furniture, draperies, clocks, paintings, and other cultural works.

Calle 25 de Mayo 379. ✆ **02/915-6060.** Free admission. Tues–Sat 10am–6pm.

Plaza Independencia ★★ Originally the site of a Spanish citadel, Independence Square marks the beginning of the Old City, and it's a good point from which to begin your tour of Montevideo. Only one gate to the old fortress remains on the Plaza. An enormous statue of Gen. José Gervasio Artigas, father of Uruguay and hero of its independence movement, stands in the center. His ashes are displayed in a mausoleum underground, beneath the monument. It's a severe, modern structure, with eerie lighting reminiscent of a horror movie. A changing-of-the-guards ceremony takes place every few hours. You'd be lucky to catch it.

Bordered by Av. 18 de Julio, Florida, and Juncal.

Teatro Solís ★★ Montevideo's main theater and opera house, opened in 1852, underwent an extensive renovation in late 1990. It hosts Uruguay's most important cultural events. While the structure on its outside remains historical, the interior is a thoroughly modern contrast.

Calle Buenos Aires 652. ✆ **02/1950-1856.** www.teatrosolis.org.uy. Guided tours are Tues, Thurs–Fri, and Sun 11am, noon, and 5pm and Sat 11am, noon, and 1 and 5pm for about $1 (70p) in Spanish and $1.25 (70p) in English and Portuguese. Wed guided tours at 11am, noon, and 5pm are free. Evening cultural productions will vary in price and time.

MONTEVIDEO & CARNAVAL

One of the most delightful times to come to Montevideo is Carnaval season, usually in late January, February, and early March when there are street festivals as well as theatrical competitions. It's at this time that several aspects particular to Uruguayan culture come to the forefront. Established as a border colony between the edges of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, it seems a mix between an Argentine and Brazilian festival. You'll see *murgas,* or street dancing bands, similar to those in Argentina, as well as foxy feather-festooned females as you'd see in Rio. It's also a time when the Afro-Uruguayan population, descendants of slaves who represent about 7% of the country, become truly visible and celebrated. *Llamadas,* or African drum bands, are part of the festivities. A highlight of Carnaval season is February 2, the day celebrating the sea-goddess *Yemanga,* from the *Candomblé* religion, a fusion of African beliefs brought over by slaves and blended with Catholic ideology. Thousands head to Playa Ramirez, across from Parque Rodó and other beaches, to listen to music, worship, and leave offerings in the sea. Year-round, the **Museo del Carnaval,** at Rambla 25 de Agosto de 1825, 218 at Maciel (✆ **02/916-5493** or 02/915-0802), in the port area, provides an excellent perspective on the celebrations.

WHERE TO STAY

Parking is included in the rates of most Uruguay hotels. In 2005, Montevideo repealed its hotel tax for foreigners (but it's still paid by locals).

Expensive

Belmont House ★★ Finds A boutique hotel in Montevideo's peaceful Carrasco neighborhood, Belmont House has small elegant spaces with carefully chosen antiques and wood furnishings that give this hotel the feeling of a wealthy private home. Guest rooms feature two- or four-poster beds; rich, colorful linens; and marble bathrooms with small details such as towel warmers and deluxe toiletries. Many of the rooms feature balconies overlooking the pretty courtyard and pool, and two of the rooms have Jacuzzis. Belmont House is a skip and a jump away from the beach, golf, and tennis. Gourmands will find an excellent international restaurant, afternoon tea, and a *parrilla* open weekends next to the pool. The gracious staff assists guests with outdoor activities and local itineraries.

Av. Rivera 6512, 11500 Montevideo. ✆ **02/600-0430.** Fax 02/600-8609. www.belmonthouse.com.uy. 28 units. $260 (£176) double; from $325 (£220) suite. Rates include gourmet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; *paradilla;* tearoom; bar; outdoor pool; discounts for nearby golf and tennis; fitness center; sauna; business center; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer.

Radisson Montevideo Victoria Plaza Hotel ★★ The Victoria Plaza has long been one of Montevideo's top hotels. Standing in the heart of the financial district, this European-style hotel makes a good base from which to do business or explore the capital.

Its convention center and casino also make it the center of the city's business and social activity. Ask for a room in the new tower, which houses spacious guest rooms and executive suites with classic French-style furnishings and panoramic city or river views. The busy hotel has a large multilingual staff that attends closely to guests' needs. Inquire about weekend spa packages. Victoria Plaza is famous for its casino, with French roulette tables, blackjack, baccarat, slot machines, horse races, and bingo. There are two lobby bars, in addition to the casino bars. **Arcadia** (p. 180), on the 25th floor, is the city's most elegant dining room.

Plaza Independencia 759, 11100 Montevideo. ✆ **02/902-0111.** Fax 02/902-1628. www.radisson.com/montevideouy. 254 units. $215 (£146) double; from $235 (£159) suite. Rates include breakfast at rooftop restaurant. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking and valet service. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; 2 bars; health club w/indoor pool; fitness center w/aerobics classes; sauna; Jacuzzi; concierge; travel agency; business center w/high-speed Internet access; room service; massage; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive floors. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Sheraton Montevideo ★★ When it opened in 1999, the Sheraton Montevideo replaced Plaza Victoria as Montevideo's most luxurious hotel. A walkway connects the hotel to the Punta Carretas Shopping Center, one of the city's best malls. Spacious guest rooms have imported furniture, king-size beds, sleeper chairs, marble bathrooms, 25-inch televisions, and works by Uruguayan artists. Choose among views of the Río de la Plata, Uruguay Golf Club, or downtown Montevideo; views from the 20th through 24th floors are the most impressive. Rooms on the top two executive floors feature Jacuzzis and individual sound systems. Hotel service is excellent, particularly for guests with business needs. The main restaurant, Las Carretas, serves Continental cuisine with a Mediterranean flair. Don't miss the dining room's spectacular murals by contemporary Uruguayan artist Carlos Vilaro. Next door, the lobby bar is a popular spot for casual business meetings and afternoon cocktails.

Calle Víctor Soliño 349, 11300 Montevideo. ✆ **02/710-2121.** Fax 02/712-1262. www.sheraton.com. 207 units. From $235 (£159) double; from $355 (£240) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Valet and free parking available. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; indoor pool; health club w/fitness center; sauna; concierge; car-rental desk; business center and secretarial services; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive floors; emergency medical service. *In room:* A/C, TV, Internet (fee), minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Moderate

Holiday Inn ★ This colorful Holiday Inn is actually one of the city's best hotels, popular with tourists and business travelers alike. It's in the heart of downtown, next to Montevideo's main square. Bilingual staff members greet you in the marble lobby, which is attached to a good restaurant and bar. Guest rooms have simple, contemporary furnishings typical of an American chain. Because the hotel doubles as a convention center, it can become very busy. On the flip side, rooms are heavily discounted when the hotel is empty; be sure to ask for promotional rates, which can be as low as $60 (£41) per night.

Colonia 823, 11100 Montevideo. ✆ **02/902-0001.** Fax 02/902-1242. www.holidayinn.com.uy. 137 units. From $90 (£61) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; heated indoor pool; fitness center; sauna; business center; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi in public areas. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, safe.

Sheraton Four Points Montevideo ★★ The Sheraton Four Points is the newest of Montevideo's international hotels. It's considered a four-star property, but it falls somewhere between four and five. The staff is extremely friendly and helpful. Whether

on business dealing with the government, or visiting downtown as a tourist, the location across from city hall is convenient. The lobby is stark and modern, with polished black-granite panels over white walls in the soaring atrium. Many rooms have views to the Río de la Plata. Bathrooms are spacious and suite bathrooms have hydro-massage bathtubs. All rooms have high-speed Internet access, at a charge of $16 (£11) a day. While small, the enclosed rooftop gym and spa has an unparalleled view of the city. There is a $5 (£3.40) charge for using these areas of the hotel. Breakfast is an additional $16 (£11) in the lobby's restaurant, which is also open for lunch and dinner, offering international cuisine.

Ejido 1275, at Soriano, across from the Intendencia (City Hall), 11000 Montevideo. ✆ **02/901-7000.** Fax 02/903-2247. www.fourpoints.com/montevideo. 135 units, including 18 suites. From $135 (£91) double; from $235 (£159) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; indoor pool; health club w/fitness center; sauna; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Inexpensive

Days Inn Obelisco Value This modern Days Inn caters to business travelers looking for good-value accommodations. The hotel is located next to the Tres Cruces bus station, not far from downtown or the airport. Rooms are comfortable and modern, if not overly spacious. Free local calls are permitted.

Acevedo Díaz 1821, 11800 Montevideo. ✆ **02/400-4840.** Fax 02/402-0229. www.daysinn.com. 60 units. From $65 (£44) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Coffee shop; small health club; business center; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Restaurants in Montevideo serve steaks that's just as high in quality as Argentine beef, and they usually include a number of steaks and seafood selections as well. You will find the native barbecue, in which beef and lamb are grilled on the fire, in any of the city's *parrilladas* (the name for *parrillas* in Uruguay). Sales tax on dining in Montevideo is a whopping 23%. There's also usually a table cover charge *(cubierto)* of about $1 (70p) per person.

Expensive

Arcadia ★★ Moments INTERNATIONAL While the food is great, the wraparound views from this 26th-floor restaurant outshine the menu. Tables are nestled in semiprivate nooks with floor-to-ceiling bay windows. The classic dining room is decorated with Italian curtains and crystal chandeliers; each table has a fresh rose and sterling silver place settings. Creative plates, such as terrine of pheasant marinated in cognac, are followed by grilled rack of lamb glazed with mint and garlic, or duck confit served on a thin strudel pastry with red cabbage. We list general main course prices below, but the Uruguayan caviar menu will set you back about $175 (£118).

Plaza Independencia 759. ✆ **02/902-0111.** Main courses $6–$25 (£4.05–£17). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 7pm–midnight.

Moderate

El Fogón ★ PARRILLADA/SEAFOOD/URUGUAYAN This brightly lit *parrillada* and seafood restaurant is popular with Montevideo's late-night crowd. The extensive menu includes calamari, salmon, shrimp, and other fish, as well as generous steak and pasta dishes. Food here is priced well and prepared with care. The express lunch menu comes with steak or chicken, dessert, and a glass of wine.

San José 1080 at Río Negro. ✆ **02/900-0900.** Main courses $6–$12 (£4.05–£8.20). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 7pm–1am.

El Palenque ★ SEAFOOD/PARRILLADA Located in the Mercado del Puerto, this is one of the area's most popular restaurants, crowded with locals and tourists alike. It gets especially crowded when the cruise ships come in. It has been around since 1958. Fish is the highlight, but they also have tapas, pastas, paellas, and lots of grilled meats. A specialty is the Paella Exotica, made with rabbit.

Perez Castellano 1579 (at Rambla 25 de Agosto 400, in the Mercado del Puerto). ✆ **02/917-0190** or 02/915-4704. www.elpalenque.com.uy. Main courses $8–$14 (£5.40–£9.45). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–midnight; Sun noon–5pm.

El Peregrino PARRILLADA/SEAFOOD/ITALIAN This large, charming spot offers atmospheric dining with its rustic tables, brick and yellow walls, and numerous old photographs. They offer several fish dishes, Italian, and lots of beef, pork and chicken dishes.

Calle Pérez Castellano 1553, at Piedras (at the Mercado del Puerto). ✆ **02/916-4737.** Main courses $5–$8 (£3.40–£5.40). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–midnight.

El Viejo y el Mar ★ SEAFOOD Resembling an old fishing club, El Viejo y el Mar is on the riverfront near the Sheraton. The bar is made from an abandoned boat, while the dining room is decorated with dock lines, sea lamps, and pictures of 19th-century regattas. You'll find every kind of fish and pasta on the menu, and the restaurant is equally popular for evening cocktails. An outdoor patio is open most of the year.

Rambla Gandhi 400. ✆ **02/710-5704.** Main courses $5–$10 (£3.40–£6.80). MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 8pm–1am.

Los Leños ★★ PARRILLADA/SEAFOOD/URUGUAYAN This casual *parrillada* resembles one you'd find in Buenos Aires—except that this one also serves an outstanding range of *mariscos* (seafood), such as the Spanish paella or *lenguado Las Brasas* (a flathead fish) served with prawns, mushrooms, and mashed potatoes. From the *parrilla,* the *filet de lomo* is the best cut—order it with Roquefort, mustard, or black-pepper sauce. The restaurant's fresh produce is displayed in a case near the kitchen. Hillary Clinton once visited this restaurant, and a picture of her with the staff hangs proudly on the wall.

San José 909, at Convencion. ✆ **02/900-2285.** www.parrilla.com.uy. Main courses $2–$17 (£1.35–£12). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:45am–3:30pm and 8pm–midnight.

SHOPPING

The **Villa Biarritz fair,** at Parque Zorilla de San Martín-Ellauri, takes place Saturday from 9:30am to 3pm, featuring handicrafts, antiques, books, fruit and vegetable vendors, flowers, and other goodies. The **Mercado del Puerto (Port Market)** ★ opens afternoons and weekends at Piedras and Yacaré, letting you sample the flavors of Uruguay, from small empanadas to enormous barbecued meats. Saturday is the best day to visit. Numerous leather and souvenir stores are on Calle Perez Castellano, leading from the port. **Tristán Narvaja,** Avenida 18 de Julio in the Cordón neighborhood, is the city's Sunday flea market (6am–3pm), initiated more than 55 years ago by Italian immigrants. **De la Abundancia/Artesanos** is a food-and-handicrafts market. It takes place Monday through Saturday from 10am to 8pm at San José 1312. Leather goods at great prices are at **Casa Mario Leather Factory,** Piedras 641 at Bartolomo Mitre (✆ **02/916-2356;** www.casamarioleather.com). **Tres Cruces Shopping Mall** is part of the bus terminal complex,

with dozens of shops. It's at Avenida Serra with Acevedo Diaz (✆ **02/408-8710;** www.trescruces.com.uy).

MONTEVIDEO AFTER DARK

As in Buenos Aires, nightlife in Montevideo means drinks after 10pm and dancing after midnight. For earlier entertainment, ask at your hotel or call the **Teatro Solís,** Calle Buenos Aires 652 (✆ 02/1950-1856; www.teatrosolis.org.uy), the city's center for opera, theater, ballets, and symphonies, for performance information. **SODRE,** Av. 18 de Julio 930 (✆ 02/901-2850; www.sodre.gub.uy), is the city's "Official Radio Service," which hosts classical music concerts from May to November. Gamblers should head to the **Plaza Victoria Casino,** Plaza Independencia (✆ 02/902-0111), a fashionable venue with French roulette tables, blackjack, baccarat, slot machines, horse races, and bingo It opens at 2pm and keeps going through most of the night. **Mariachi,** Gabriel Pereira 2964 (✆ 02/709-1600), is one of the city's top bars and discos, with live bands or DJ music Wednesday to Sunday after 10pm. **Café Misterio,** Costa Rica 1700 (✆ 02/600-5999), is another popular bar. Montevideo's best tango clubs are **La Casa de Becho,** Nueva York 1415 (✆ 02/400-2717; Fri–Sat after 10:30pm), where composer Gerardo Mattos Rodríguez wrote the famous "La Cumparsita," and **Cuareim,** Zelmar Michelini 1079 (no phone; Wed and Fri–Sat after 9pm), which offers both tango and *candombe,* a lively dance indigenous to the area with its roots in early slave culture. The tourist office can give you schedule information for Montevideo's other tango salons.

7 SAN ANTONIO DE ARECO & PAMPAS ESTANCIAS

111km (69 miles) NW of Buenos Aires

San Antonio de Areco is a quiet little town about 90 minutes north of Buenos Aires, deep in the heart of Argentina's famous Pampas. The city is best known as the center for gaucho culture, Argentina's version of American cowboy tradition. Few people stay in San Antonio, choosing to visit it as a day trip from Buenos Aires, or as a base for exploring the nearby *estancias* that surround the town.

The city is compact, built in 1730 around an old colonial church dedicated to San Antonio of Padua, from which the town takes its name. Colonial and turn-of-the-20th-century buildings abound, all reached on walkable cobblestone streets that radiate from the church and Plaza Ruiz de Arellano, the town's main square. The Río Areco divides the town in two parts. Here along the river is a monument-lined green space called Parque San Martín, crossed by an old pedestrian bridge to Parque Criollo, where the city's most famous site, the Museo Gauchesco Ricardo Güiraldes, sits.

The city's main shopping streets are Alsina and Arellano, heading south from Plaza Arellano. It's a year-round tourism destination, but it lives for the annual **Día de la Tradición,** generally held around November 10. Gauchos, real and wannabe, fill the town, playing gaucho games of skill such as the *sortija,* in which they catch rings from poles while riding horses, giving them as gifts to beautiful women in the audience. San Antonio doesn't have many hotels, and those it does have fill up fast at this time of year. (Of course, there is always the gaucho's pad, if he hands you his *sortija* ring.) See also the section on *estancias,* below; all are within a short drive of the center of San Antonio.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE San Antonio de Areco can be reached by car from Buenos Aires by driving north along Ruta 8. The drive takes about 1 ½ hours. Most people come by bus, however. **Chevallier** offers hourly bus service from Buenos Aires's Retiro Bus depot (✆ **2326/453-904** in San Antonio, 11/4000-5255 in Buenos Aires, or 0800/222-6565 toll-free).

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Dirección de Turismo de San Antonio de Areco** tourism information center (✆ **2326/453-165;** www.pagosdeareco.com.ar) is in Parque San Martín along the Río Areco waterfront, near the intersection of Avenida Zerboni with Calle Zapiola and Calle Arellano. It is open 7 days a week from 8am to 7pm. The website www.sanantoniodeareco.com also provides more tourism information.

GETTING AROUND Within San Antonio itself, your feet can take you most of the places you need to go. Even the most distant actual attraction, the Museo of the Gaucho, is only a 15-minute walk from the center of town. Because many people use the town as a base for exploring other parts of the Pampas, such as the numerous *estancias, remises* are a must. Contact the 24-hour **Remis Zerboni,** Zerboni 313, near Alsina (✆ **2326/453-288**). The town is also great for bike riding; most hotels provide free bicycle loans.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

The center of San Antonio de Areco is the leafy **Plaza Arellano,** surrounded by cobblestone streets and overseen by a statue of Juan Hipólito Vieytes, a local involved in the Argentine war for independence from Spain. His memorial sits in an acoustic circle, so talking here is fun, especially if you bring kids. The statue faces south to Mitre Street, staring at the church from which the town draws its name, **San Antonio de Padua,** rebuilt in the late 1800s over the original 1730 colonial version. Colonial on the outside, the interior mixes Gothic and neoclassical styles with frescoes of angels and saints in niches on the walls, all overseen by a coffered ceiling. On the plaza's north side is the Belle Epoque **Municipal Hall,** a long pink building at Lavalle 363 with an attractive central courtyard. Nearby is the **Draghi Museum and Shop,** Lavalle 387, between Alsina and Arellano (✆ **2326/454-219;** daily approximately 10am–5pm, though technically by appointment only). Opened by the late Juan Jose Draghi, a master silversmith who began his career more than 45 years ago making ornamental items for gauchos, it is now run by his son Mariano. The museum is itself a work of art, with its exquisite stained-glass ceiling. The museum also has its own hotel (p. 184). A few blocks away, you can watch other silversmiths at work in the small **Artesano Platero,** Alsina at Zerboni, facing the Parque San Martín (✆ **2326/454-843** or 2325/15-656-995 [cell]; www.arecoplateria.com.ar; daily 9:30am–12:30pm and 3–9pm).

From here, head to **Parque San Martín,** on the south side of the Río Areco. It's lined with trees and monuments, and full of vine-covered walkways called *glorietas.* It's a place where families picnic and kids play soccer or climb over the small dam constructed in the river. Two bridges cross the park here, but the most picturesque is the **Puente Viejo,** originally constructed in the 1850s as a toll crossing. The other end of the river has Parque Criollo, and here sits the city's most famous site, the **Museum of the Gaucho** (aka **Museo Ricardo Güiraldes,** in honor of the author of *Don Segundo Sombra*), Camino Ricardo Güiraldes, at Sosa (✆ **2326/455-839;** www.museoguiraldes.com.ar; Wed–Mon 10am–4:30pm). Written in 1926, the novel immortalized the noble gaucho, making him an honored part of Argentine history. The museum combines an authentic 1830 *pulpería,* or country general store, where gauchos gathered, with a museum

designed in a colonial style by Argentine architect José María Bustillo in 1936. Here you will find the author's personal effects, photos, books, and other gaucho memorabilia. It's a bit kitschy (think rooms filled with gaucho mannequins), but if you speak Spanish, a conversation with the museum's guide and historian, Omar Tapia, will help you put the gauchos in their proper historical context.

Excursions to San Antonio & Estancias

Various travel companies in Buenos Aires arrange day trips to San Antonio de Areco, with or without overnight stays on nearby *estancias.* **Borello Travel & Tours** is a travel firm specializing in upscale travel with offices in New York and Buenos Aires (7 Park Ave., Ste. 21, New York, NY 10016; ✆ **800/405-3072** or 212/686-4911) or Perú (359 Ste. 407, Buenos Aires 1067; ✆ **11/5031-1988;** www.borellotravel.com). They can include a visit to San Antonio with stays in the local *estancias.* They maintain an additional office in Buenos Aires (✆ **11/5031-1988**). Buenos Aires–based **Say Hueque Tourism,** with two locations (at Viamonte 749, Office 601, 1053 Buenos Aires, ✆ **11/5199-2517;** and at Guatemala 4845, Office 4, 1425 Buenos Aires, ✆ **11/4775-7862;** www.sayhueque.com), also provides trips to this area.

WHERE TO STAY

Draghi Paradores ★ The Draghi Paradores is a small apartment hotel opened in 2006 behind the Draghi museum and store. It is the newest and one of the nicest of San Antonio's hotels, with a slightly romantic feel. Built in a Spanish colonial style, the entrance is graced by a small pool and fountain in an enclosed courtyard. It looks a little like a miniature version of the *Melrose Place* apartment building, minus backstabbing blondes in high heels and miniskirts. The five rooms are clean with a country style to them, with a rich use of woods, frilly white bedding, and terra-cotta tiles on the floor. Two of the rooms also come with small kitchens, making them ideal for families or for longer-term stays in San Antonio. All rooms are air-conditioned and have cable TV, and breakfast is included in the rate.

Lavalle 387 (btw. Alsina and Arellano), 2760 San Antonio de Areco. ✆ **2326/455-583** or 02326/454-515. www.sanantoniodeareco.com/paradores. 5 units, including 2 with kitchens. From $74 (£50) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Heated outdoor pool; free bicycle loans; concierge; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, kitchen (in some), minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Hostal de Areco This small family-style hotel is in a historic turn-of-the-20th-century red house, set back from the street and surrounded by a small garden. There are seven small, spartan, tile-floor rooms, each equipped with a full-size bed and a bathroom. Dark-green curtains and bedspreads give the rooms an even smaller appearance. The accommodations are very basic, with no air-conditioning and only a ceiling fan, but each comes with cable TV.

Zapioli 25, near the intersection of Zerboni, 2760 San Antonio de Areco. ✆ **2326/456-118.** 7 units. From $41 (£28) double, including breakfast. No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** Free bicycle loans; concierge; laundry service. *In room:* Ceiling fan, TV.

Hotel San Carlos ★ Overlooking the Parque San Martín, this is the most business-like hotel in town. You'll find a sun deck equipped with a grill, Jacuzzi, and two outdoor heated swimming pools in the courtyard, with a fountain decorated with a mosaic of San Antonio de Padua. (It's one of the few places in all of Argentina where you're likely to see bikini-clad women frolicking in front of religious icons, unless you belong to a particu-

larly liberal church.) Some rooms are on the small side, but they're larger in the hotel's new wing. Many come with hydro-massage tubs or Jacuzzis in the bathrooms, and a few two-bedroom apartments have kitchens. Breakfast, included in the rates, is served in the lobby. The hotel added a spa in late 2008. Ask about spa packages with special higher room rates.

Avenida Zerboni (on the west corner, at the intersection of Zapiola), 2760 San Antonio de Areco. ✆ **2326/456-119.** www.hotel-sancarlos.com.ar. 30 units (25 doubles, 5 apts). From $41 (£28) double; from $74 (£50) apt. Rates include breakfast. Higher prices for all-day use of spa. AE, MC, V. Free covered parking. **Amenities:** 2 heated outdoor pools; health club; spa; Jacuzzi; free bicycle rental; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; *asado;* high-speed Internet station; Wi-Fi in lobby. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer.

Los Abuelos Alberto Cesar Reyes is your grandfather at this property overlooking Parque San Martín and the Río Areco—the hotel's name literally means the grandparents. The hotel is basic, with a lot of white metal and Formica furnishings in the tile-floored room. The beds are covered with sea-foam green chenille bedspreads. Some bathrooms are tub/shower combinations, while others are only showers. Every room has newly installed air conditioners along with ceiling fans. An aboveground pool is surrounded by a small deck in the back of the property, where the parking lot is located. A nice warm touch is a gas fireplace in the front lobby, which is surrounded by simple pine chairs and tables where breakfast is served.

Avenida Zerboni on the corner at the intersection of Zapiola. 2760 San Antonio de Areco. ✆ **02326/456-390.** www.sanantoniodeareco.com/losabuelos. 9 units. From $42 (£28) double. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor aboveground pool; free bicycle loans; concierge; 24-hr. room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, TV, Wi-Fi, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Almacén de Ramos Generelos ARGENTINE/SPANISH/PARRILLA This restaurant, housed in a turn-of-the-20th-century building, is one of the best-known restaurants in San Antonio de Areco. It has a *parrilla* and international items on the menu, and also offers a broad selection of paellas. Its interior, with rich wooden details, will take you back in time.

Zapiola 143, at Segundo Sombra. No phone. Main courses $4–$8 (£2.70–£5.40). AE. Daily noon–3pm and 8–11pm.

Corner Pizza ARGENTINE/INTERNATIONAL This simple place overlooks the Parque San Martín and the Río Areco. You'll find a selection of fast-food items on the menu, from hot dogs and hamburgers to pizza. Many people just come here to down a beer and look at the park. It's ideal if you're on a budget.

Av. Zerboni at Alsina, overlooking Parque San Martín. No phone. Main courses $1–$4 (70p–£2.70). No credit cards. Daily 10am–11pm.

La Esquina de Merti ★ PARRILLA/ARGENTINE This restaurant has an old-fashioned feel to it, with exposed brick walls, an ancient copper coffeemaker on the bar, wooden tables overlaid with black-and-white-checkered tablecloths, and shelves full of apothecary jars. But it's all a trick: La Esquina de Merti opened in late 2005, in the location of an old *almacén,* or Argentine general store. In any case, the food, concentrating on the beef the region is famous for, is great. You'll find a beef and chicken *parrilla,* and a selection of pastas and empanadas. The house specialty is *mollejas* with cream, lemon, and champagne (*mollejas* are the softly grilled, melt-in-your-mouth pancreas or thymus

of a cow, which might be worth trying for an only-in-Argentina experience). A large wine selection complements everything on the menu.

Arellano 147, at Segundo Sombra (overlooking Plaza Arellano). ✆ **2326/456-705.** Main courses $4–$10 (£2.70–£6.80). AE, V. Daily 9am–2am (Fri–Sat until 3am).

PAMPAS & ESTANCIAS

San Antonio is a popular base for exploring Argentina's famous *estancias,* which doubled historically as both farms and fortresses, built throughout the country along trails from Buenos Aires as a means of conquering and stabilizing territory originally controlled by the Indians. The majority of Argentina's *estancias* date from the mid- to late 1800s. After General Roca's Campaign of the Desert in the 1870s, in which he murdered most of the Indian population within 150 miles of Buenos Aires, the land gave rise to *estancias* and their cattle and grain production. Despite the bloody history that gave birth to them, today they're seen as a retreat from the chaos and stress of Buenos Aires. They are popular among Porteños on weekends or for day trips. With the increasing boom of tourism to Argentina, many foreigners are beginning to delight in them as well.

Most of the *estancias* listed here are a half-hour from San Antonio, and no more than 2 hours from Buenos Aires. You can drive to all of them on your own, or use a bus service from Buenos Aires to San Antonio, and then catch a taxi from there. For a fee in the range of $80 to $100 (£54–£70), almost all the *estancias* will also provide transportation from your hotel or the airport in Buenos Aires. Because many *estancias* are accessed by dirt roads, it is advisable to rent a 4WD vehicle if you decide to drive yourself, especially if rain is predicted during the time of your visit. The websites of the *estancias* listed here post detailed driving maps.

Services and features vary, but the atmosphere at most *estancias* is a cross between a rustic resort and a bed-and-breakfast. Nothing relieves stress like a few days in the country, and horseback riding, trekking, lounging by the pool, and eating and drinking aplenty are all part of a day in the Pampas. In general, the rates for *estancias* include a full board of four meals—breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner—and sometimes all drinks, including alcohol. Lunch, the highlight of dining on an *estancia,* is usually an *asado,* or barbecue, where everyone, including the workers, gathers to socialize. Day rates generally include only lunch and limited activities. Most *estancias* are real working farms, with hundreds of acres and cows, horses, and other animals attended by real gauchos (not all of whom dress in the traditional way). If you're in the mood to milk a cow or watch the birth of colt, you just might have the chance.

El Cencerro ★★★ Smaller, cozier, and more rustic than some of the other places listed here, this working *estancia* will make you feel like you're part of the farm's daily goings-on. It's owned by Buenos Aires–based psychologist Liliana Herbstein, who spends her weekends here. The ranch takes its name from the *cencerro,* a bell used by gauchos to tame horses. Rooms and public areas are filled with antiques and odd objects Liliana and her husband Eduardo have collected over the years, including antique luggage from Liliana's family's old store in Buenos Aires. Eduardo is an architect and artist, whose work also hangs throughout the main house. Activities include horseback riding, helping with the animals if you want, carriage rides, bicycle rides, and trekking. Only 3km (2 miles) away is historic Capilla del Señor, a charming town established in the early 1700s. You can walk or bike there on your own, or ask for optional guided tours. Similar to San Antonio de Areco in feel, it's virtually unknown to non-Argentines. Real gauchos wander the downtown, going about their business after a day tending cattle. Every second Tuesday of the month, the town has an animal auction, which Liliana attends with some of

her guests. The area is also the center of Argentine ballooning, offered as an option for another $150 (£102) per person. The main house was renovated in 2008 so that it contains five bedrooms, three as suites with private bathrooms, each large enough for a family of four. An additional house has been opened in the adjacent ranch, with two units, also large enough for families. A gourmet chef cooks dinner, and a new playroom has a game room, small home theater, and other amenities. One of the charms of this property is the wooded creek flowing through it; it makes a relaxing place for a nap, a picnic, or an afternoon spent reading. The property is 21 hectares (52 acres). You can access the *estancia* by bus from Buenos Aires to Capilla del Señor and then a $6 (£4.05) taxi ride. By *remise* from Buenos Aires, 80km (50 miles) away, it's about $80 (£54).

Buenos Aires Provincial Ruta 39, 2812 Capilla del Señor. ✆ **11/4743-2319,** or 11/15-6093-2319 (cell) in Buenos Aires. www.estanciaelcencerro.com.ar. 5 units, including 3 suites. From $150 (£102). Rates include all meals and some drinks. Day rate of $75 (£51) includes lunch only. No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; bicycles; game rooms; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; bird-watching; carriage riding; horseback riding. *In room:* Ceiling fan.

El Ombú de Areco ★★★ El Ombú takes its name from the tree that dominates the Pampas. It's among the most historic *estancias* near Buenos Aires. General Pablo Riccheri, an Italian military man who came to Argentina during the unification wars, built the original vine-covered house in 1880. The general atmosphere and the overgrown row of trees out front will remind you of a plantation in the Southern U.S. The rooms in the old house, with high ceilings, are best. But you really can't go wrong here; all the rooms have romantic appeal, decorated with brass beds, floral linens, and a strong country atmosphere. There are two pools, one in a small courtyard, another on the edge of the main garden with a fantastic view of the sun setting over horses in the fields. Several game rooms are on the grounds, with TVs, movies, and other activities, and it's easy to mingle with the very friendly staff. This is a working ranch, with 300 hectares (741 acres) of land and more than 400 cows and other animals. Horseback riding, cattle roundups, sunset carriage riding, bicycling, and many other activities are available, and all four meals and drinks are included in the rate. They also accept pets. Some rooms have hydro-massage tubs, others tub/shower combinations. Rooms are not air-conditioned but have ceiling fans. The *estancia* is about 10km (6 miles) from San Antonio and 120km (74 miles) from Buenos Aires. Their *remise* service costs $85 (£58) from Buenos Aires and about $105 (£71) from Ezeiza airport. A taxi from San Antonio de Areco is about $11 (£7.45). There is a 10% discount on room rates if paid in cash.

Buenos Aires Provincial Ruta 31, Cuartel 6, 2760 San Antonio de Areco. ✆ **2326/492-080,** or 11/4737-0436 Buenos Aires. www.estanciaelombu.com. 9 units. From $200 (£135) single; $320 (£217) double. Rates include all meals and drinks. Day rate of $70 (£47) includes lunch only. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Pets allowed. **Amenities:** 2 outdoor pools; bicycles; game rooms; concierge; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; carriage riding; horseback riding. *In room:* Ceiling fan, hair dryer.

El Rosario de Areco ★★★ Unlike most *estancia* owners, who live in Buenos Aires, Francisco and Florencia de Guevera live year-round on their *estancia,* along with some of their nine children. This *estancia* is among the most pleasant to visit, with its barn-red buildings and bougainvilleas scattered among the grounds. The *estancia* dates from 1892, but the rooms, many of which are in former horse stalls, have surprisingly modern interiors. The waitstaff is a little different here, too. Instead of running around in gaucho outfits, they wear chic black uniforms, as if they popped in part-time from another job in Palermo Soho. The owners regularly greet guests, and Francisco cooks the lunch *asado.* The public rooms and even some of the gardens have Wi-Fi, which is rare for an *estancia.*

They have 16 double rooms, all with large private bathrooms. Rooms are not air-conditioned, but they come with ceiling fans, and some rooms also have fireplaces. The owners are building a small hotel with 30 rooms on the 80-hectare (198-acre) grounds; it's set to open in mid-2009. Presently, the property offers a small polo field, horseback riding, carriage riding, two swimming pools, several public rooms with TVs, and other recreational activities such as pool and video games. The hotel is 7km (4 1/3 miles) from San Antonio de Areco and 100km (62 miles) from Buenos Aires. From San Antonio, a taxi will run about $8 (£5.40), and the *estancia*'s *remise* service is $110 (£74) from Buenos Aires. They accept only cash, but plan to take credit cards at the new hotel only once it opens.

Buenos Aires Provincial Ruta 41 (mailing address is Castilla de Correo 85), 2760 San Antonio de Areco. ✆ **2326/451-000** or 11/15-3562-8500 (cell). www.rosariodeareco.com.ar. 16 units. From $224–$284 (£152–£192) double. Rates include all meals and drinks. Day rate of $75 (£51) includes lunch only (call ahead for day-rate availability). No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** 2 outdoor pools; bicycles; game room; concierge; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; carriage riding; horseback riding; polo fields; TV lounges; Wi-Fi. *In room:* Ceiling fan, hair dryer, safe, fireplace (in some rooms).

La Bamba ★★★ This is one of the most gorgeous and romantic *estancias* near Buenos Aires. The original building opened in 1830 as a stagecoach stop along what had once been the old Camino Real, linking Buenos Aires with other colonial cities. The buildings are Pompeian red with white trim, contrasting with the rich green landscape. The Argentine movie *Camila,* about a forbidden romance in the 1840s, was filmed here and nominated for Best Foreign Film in the 1984 Academy Awards. If you are honeymooning in Argentina, this place is ideal—especially the isolated Torre Room in the main house, on the third floor, in what had been a lookout tower with windows on all sides opening onto the expansive Pampas. Swimming, horseback riding, carriage riding, trekking, and other activities are all available. The 150-hectare (371-acre) property has cows, soy, and wheat fields. The *estancia* is 13km (8 miles) from San Antonio and 123km (76 miles) from Buenos Aires. A taxi from San Antonio is about $8 (£5.40), and a *remise* service from Buenos Aires is $55 (£37). The *estancia* was recently bought by Frenchman Jean Francois Decaux, and is closed while undergoing renovation, which should be completed by October 2009. New electrical wiring, air-conditioning, pool, and polo ground improvements, as well as other items are part of the process, while maintaining the historical nature of the location. In the meantime, La Bamba is partnering with the nearby Estancia Bamba Chica (Buenos Aires Provincial Ruta Nacional 8, 2760 San Antonio de Areco; ✆ **11/4732-1269;** www.bambachica.com.ar) for guests.

Buenos Aires Provincial Ruta 31, 2760 San Antonio de Areco. ✆ **2326/456-293.** www.la-bamba.com.ar. 12 units. $300–$350 (£203–£237) double. Rates include all meals and drinks. Day rate of $100 (£68) includes lunch only. AE, DC, MC. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; spa; bicycles; game rooms; concierge; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service; carriage riding; horseback riding; high-speed Internet. *In room:* A/C, ceiling fan, Wi-Fi, hair dryer, safe.

7

Iguazú Falls & the Northeast

by Charlie O'Malley

"Niagara on Viagra" is how one visitor put it when he saw Iguazú for the first time. Twenty-three kilometers (14 miles) of deafening waterfalls plummet up to 70m (229 ft.) into a giant gorge in a spectacular subtropical setting. The sheer power is overwhelming. You come face to face with raging sheets of water, with sprays so intense it seems as though geysers have erupted from below. Iguazú is a must-see on any trip to Argentina.

It's shocking that this ecological blockbuster is a 90-minute flight from the civilized, cosmopolitan buzz of Buenos Aires. Many people drop into this humid corner of Misiones province on a day trip or for 2 days max. Yet this fascinating jungle zone of red soil, giant butterflies, and comical toucans has more to offer than jaw-dropping water falls. Misiones Province is a heady mix of strong indigenous tribal culture, blond eastern European settlers, and tropical frontierland. Its abundant wildlife and its long-fallen, mysterious Jesuit ruins are worth exploring. With its multitude of isolated national parks and huge swaths of untouched rainforest, it is an eco-tourist's paradise, with several genuine jungle lodges. Civilization has encroached in the form of tea plantations and pine forests, yet it is possible to get off the beaten track and visit isolated wonders such as Esteros del Ibera, a vast marshland teeming with wildlife that is fast becoming one of Argentina's hottest destinations.

1 IGUAZU FALLS & PUERTO IGUAZU ★★

1,330km (825 miles) NE of Buenos Aires

A dazzling panorama of cascades whose power overwhelms the sounds of the surrounding jungle, **Las Cataratas del Iguazú (Iguazú Falls)** refers to the spectacular canyon of waterfalls fed by the Río Iguazú. Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1984, these 275 waterfalls were shaped by 120 million years of geological upheaval, forming one of earth's most unforgettable sights. Iguazú Falls are shared by Argentina and Brazil, and are easily accessible from nearby Paraguay as well. One million visitors a year means the park has become somewhat overdeveloped, with too many restaurants and a theme park–style railway. However, the falls are too huge and magnificent to be encroached upon completely by humans, and the excellent walking circuits on both the Argentine and Brazilian sides allow visitors to peek over the tops and almost touch the torrent. Most visitors stay in the towns of Puerto Iguazú, in Argentina, or Foz do Iguaçu, in Brazil, or in some well-appointed hotels on the road to the park.

Worth exploring is the park's subtropical jungle (see "Behind the Falls & into the Jungle," below). Here, cupay trees (South American hardwoods) tower over the various layers of life that compete for light; and the national park is known to contain 200 species

of trees, 448 species of birds, 71 species of mammals, 36 species of reptiles, 20 species of amphibians, and more than 250 species of butterflies. Iguazú's climate also provides for the flowering of plants year-round, lending brilliant color to the forest. Because spray from the waterfall keeps humidity levels over 75%, there's a tremendous growth of epiphytes, or plants that grow on other plants without taking nutrients from their hosts.

You can visit the waterfalls on your own, but you will most certainly need a tour operator to explore the jungle. Allow at least 1 full day to explore the waterfalls on the Argentine side, another to visit the Brazilian side, and perhaps half a day for a jungle tour. Many visitors base themselves in the sedate town of Puerto Iguazú, 18km (11 miles) from the park. Though hardly the most memorable place, Puerto Iguazú has a subdued charm, pretty vegetation, and friendly people, and it's not yet ruined by the tourist trade. Accommodations options are improving all the time. If you want something more vibrant, go to the Brazilian town of Foz do Iguaçu, on the other side (see "Border Crossing," later in this chapter).

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

BY PLANE **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (✆ **0810/222-86527** or 3757/420-194; www.aerolineas.com.ar), and **LAN** (✆ **3757/424-296;** www.lan.com/chile) offer up to five daily flights from Buenos Aires to **Aeropuerto Internacional Cataratas** (✆ **3757/422-013**); the trip takes 1 1/2 hours. Round-trip fares cost approximately $420 (£283), depending on whether any specials are on offer. Aerolíneas Argentinas occasionally offers flights to Iguazú from Ezeiza international airport, usually on Saturday or Sunday. Catch a taxi (for about $20/£14) or one of the shuttles from the airport to town ($5/£3.40), a 20-minute drive.

BY BUS The fastest bus service from Buenos Aires is with **Vía Bariloche** (✆ **11/4315-4456** in Buenos Aires), which takes 18 hours and costs $70 to $80 (£47–£54) one-way, depending on the seat you choose. (The more expensive fare gets you a fully reclining *cama* [bed] seat.) Less pricey but longer (21 hr.) are **Expreso Singer** (✆ **11/4313-3927** in Buenos Aires) and **Expreso Tigre Iguazú** (✆ **11/4313-3915** in Buenos Aires), which both run for about $65 (£44) one-way. **Puerto Iguazú Bus Terminal,** Calle Córdoba and Avenida Misiones (✆ **3757/423-006**), is located in the town center.

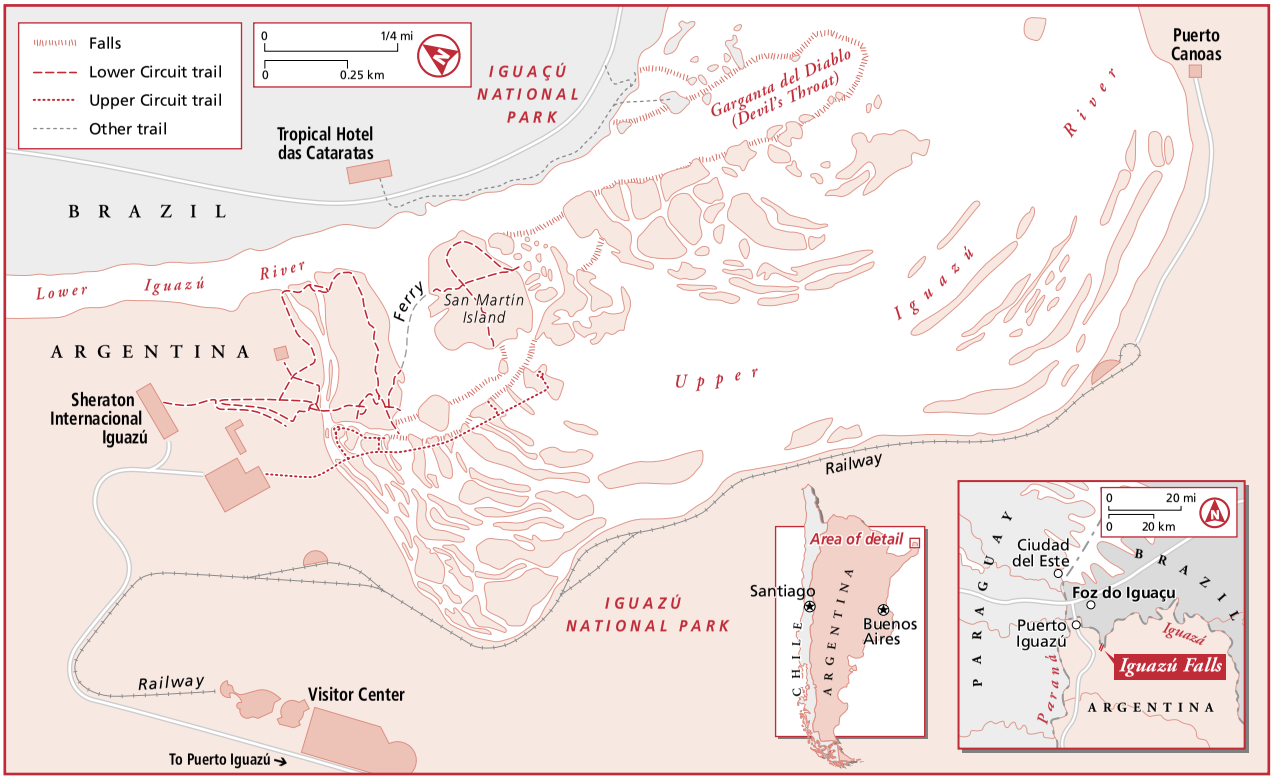
Visitor Information

In Puerto Iguazú, obtain maps and park information from the **Parque Nacional** office at Victoria Aguirre 66 (✆ **3757/420-722**), open Monday through Friday from 8am to 9pm. For information on the town, contact the municipal tourist office, at Victoria Aguirre and Brañas (✆ **3757/420-800**). It's open Monday to Friday from 8am to 9pm, Saturday and Sunday from 8am to noon and 3 to 9pm. Visitor information is also available near the national park entrance (see below).

In Buenos Aires, get information about Iguazú from Casa de la Provincia de Misiones, Av. Santa Fe 989 (✆ **11/4322-0686**), open Monday through Friday from 10am to 5pm.

Getting Around

BY BUS **El Práctico** local buses run every 45 minutes from 7am to 8pm between Puerto Iguazú bus terminal and the national park; the cost is $2 (£1.10).


Falls
Lower Circuit trail
Upper Circuit trail
Other trail
0 1/4 mi
0 0.25 km
IGUAÇÚ NATIONAL PARK
Garganta del Diablo (Devil's Throat)
Puerto Canoas
Tropical Hotel das Cataratas
BRAZIL
Lower Iguazú River
Ferry
San Martín Island
Iguazú River
ARGENTINA
Upper
Sheraton Internacional Iguazú
Railway
Area of detail
Santiago
Buenos Aires
CHILE
ARGENTINA
IGUAZÚ NATIONAL PARK
Railway
Visitor Center
To Puerto Iguazú
0 20 mi
0 20 km
Ciudad del Este
Foz do Iguaçu
Puerto Iguazú
Iguazú Falls
PARAGUAY
Paraná
BRAZIL
ARGENTINA

BY TAXI Taxis are unmetered and relatively expensive, with most drivers charging a flat fee of $20 (£14) wherever you go, whether it's to the airport or park. **Parada 10** (✆ **3757/421-527**) and **Remisses Falls VIP,** Bompland 185 (✆ **3757/420-805**), provide 24-hour taxi service. Within both Puerto Iguazú and the national park, you can easily walk or, in the former, take the narrow-gauge train.

BY CAR The main roads are excellent but be prepared for wretched mud baths if you stray. **Budget Rent a Car,** Paulino Amarante 76, Puerto Iguazú (✆ **3757/421-675;** www.budgetargentina.com), offer small cars for $70 (£47) a day.

BY MOTORBIKE/BICYCLE **Ride Cataratas,** Av. Rep. Argentina 184, Puerto Iguazú (✆ 3757/422-815), offers scooters for $30 (£17) a day. **Internet Yguazu,** Av. Victoria Aguirre 552 (✆ 3757/424-034), offers bicycles for $10 (£6.80) a day.

VISITING THE NATIONAL PARK ★★★

Your first stop will likely be the **visitor center** (✆ **3757/491-444**), where you'll find maps and information about the area's flora and fauna. Known as the Centro de Interpretacion, it is .8km (½ mile) from the park entrance, close to the parking lot and footbridges for the waterfall circuits. Adjacent to the visitor center, you will find a restaurant, snack shops, and souvenir stores. A natural-gas train takes visitors to the path entrance for the Upper and Lower circuits and to the footbridge leading to Devil's Throat. (If you'd rather walk, footpaths are available, but note that the walk to Devil's Throat is about 3km/1.75 miles.) The visitor center is staffed with a number of English-speaking guides, available for individual and private tours. You may opt to see the falls on your own or with an experienced local guide. A guide is not really necessary, however, unless your time is limited or you want to ask detailed questions about the region's geography and fauna. The entrance fee is $20 (£14), which also covers the train ride, for non-Argentines to enter the national park. The national park is open daily 8am to 7pm in summer, and from 8am until 6pm in winter.

The two main paths from which to view the water falls are the **Circuito Superior (Upper Circuit)** ★ and the **Circuito Inferior (Lower Circuit)** ★, both of which begin within walking distance (less than .8km/½ mile) from the visitor center. You may want to save your energy, however, and catch the train to the path entrance. There's a small snack shop near the beginning of the trails. The Upper Circuit winds its way along the top of the canyon, allowing you to look down the falls and see the area's rich flora, including cacti, ferns, and orchids. The Lower Circuit offers the best views, as magnificent waterfalls come hurtling down before you in walls of silvery spray. The waterfalls are clearly marked by signs along the way.

The best time to walk the **Upper Circuit** is early in the morning or late in the afternoon, and rainbows often appear near sunset. This .9km (.5-mile) path takes 1 to 2 hours, starting at the viewing tower and leading past **Dos Hermanas (Two Sisters), Bossetti, Chico (Small), Ramírez,** and **San Martín** (the park's widest) falls. You can come right to the edges of these falls and look over them as they fall as far as 60m (197 ft.) below. Along your walk, you can also look across to San Martín Island and the Brazilian side, and you'll pass a number of small streams and creeks.

The 1.8km (1.25-mile) **Lower Circuit** takes 2 hours to walk, leading you first past **Lanusse** and **Alvar Núñez** falls, then along the Lower Iguazú River past the raging **Dos Mosqueteros (Two Musketeers)** and **Tres Mosqueteros (Three Musketeers)** falls. The trail winds its way toward **Ramírez, Chico,** and **Dos Hermanos** falls. Here, you'll find an inspiring view of the **Garganta del Diablo (Devil's Throat)** and **Bossetti** falls. From

the Salto Bossetti waterfall, a small pathway leads down to a small pier, where you can catch a free boat to **San Martín Island.**

Once on the island, climb the stairs and walk along clearly marked trails for remarkable views of the surrounding *cataratas* (falls). To the left, you see the enormous **Garganta del Diablo, Saltos Brasileros (Brazilian Falls),** and **Ventana;** to the right, you overlook the mighty **Salto San Martín,** which sprays 30m (98 ft.) high after hitting the river below. This panoramic view looks out at dozens of falls forming an arch before you. San Martín Island also has a small, idyllic beach perfect for sunbathing and swimming.

Garganta del Diablo is the mother of all waterfalls in Iguazú, visible from observation points in both the Brazilian and Argentine parks. You'll notice that the water is calm as it makes its way down the Iguazú River, then begins to speed up as it approaches the gorge ahead. In front of you, Mother Nature has created a furious avalanche of water and spray that is the highest waterfall in Iguazú and one of the world's greatest natural spectacles. You might want to bring a raincoat, because you will get wet.

Outdoor Activities

INSIDE THE PARK The park's official tour operator is **Iguazú Jungle Explorer** (✆ **3757/421-696;** www.iguazujunglexplorer.com), located both inside the national park and in the Sheraton Internacional Iguazú. This company offers the Nautical Adventure tour ($30/£20), which visits the falls by inflatable raft; the Ecological Tour ($20/£14), which takes you to Devil's Throat and lets you paddle rubber boats along the Upper Iguazú Delta; and the Gran Aventura (Great Adventure) tour ($50/£34). This last tour begins with an 8km (5-mile) safari ride along the Yacoratia Path, the original dirt road that led through the forest and on to Buenos Aires. During the ride, you'll view the jungle's extensive flora and might catch a glimpse of some of the region's indigenous wildlife (see "Behind the Falls & into the Jungle," below). You will then disembark at Puerto Macuco, where you'll hop into an inflatable boat with your tour group and navigate 6.5km (4 miles) along the lower Iguazú River, braving 1.6km (1 mile) of rapids as you approach the falls in Devil's Throat Canyon. After a thrilling and wet ride, the raft lets you off across from San Martín Island. From there, catch a free boat to this island with excellent hiking trails and a small beach for swimming and sunbathing. You can combine the Ecological Tour and Great Adventure by buying a full-day Pasaporte Verde for $60 (£41). An increasingly popular tour is a guided walk around the falls under a full moon, where nighttime rainbows appear.

If you want to arrange a private adventure tour for your specific interests, the best outfit is **Explorador Expediciones,** with offices in the Sheraton Internacional Iguazú and in Puerto Iguazú at Perito Moreno 217 (✆ **3757/421-632**). The guides are experts on life in the Iguazú jungle. A jungle safari costs $35 (£24) and an excursion to the waterfall $25 (£17). English guides are available, and tours last 2 hours.

Outside the Park

CANOPY & ROCK CLIMBING **Jungle Fly,** Selva Iriapú s/n (✆ **3757/423-330;** reservas@laaldeadelaselva.com), is based in the jungle lodge La Aldea de la Selva, 7km (4 1/3 miles) outside town. They specialize in zip lining and rappelling. **Yguazu Extreme,** Santuario Sta. Maria (✆ **3757/423-660;** sanmartin_locations@hotmail.com), also organizes rock climbing and boat excursions on the Parana River. **Iguazú Forest,** Mariano Moreno 58, Puerto Iguazú (✆ **3757/421-140;** www.iguazuforest.com), will show you how to climb a waterfall in a nature reserve 7km (4 1/3 miles) south of the town.

Behind the Falls & into the Jungle

Dawn in Iguazú brings the first ra ys of light thr ough the f orest canop y, as orchids, butt erflies, fr ogs, lizar ds, parr ots, and monkey s a waken and spr ead color and life through the forest. Binoculars in hand, step softly into this wonderland, where most sounds are masked by the roar from the falls.

You'll see parakeets long before entering the jungle. Their green bodies and loud song make them easy to spot; macaws, parrots, and toucans also live here. Look and listen carefully for the great dusky swift, which nests near the waterfalls, and the g reat y ellow-breasted k iskadee, whose family name —Tyrannidae—tells much about its hunting prowess. Look below the canopy to observe an enormous population of butt erflies, the other flying w onders of the park . Brilliant blue flyers, known as morpho butterflies, flit between deciduous trees and above lines of leaf-cutter ants, along with beautiful r ed, black, and y ellow butterfly species.

It's close t o impossible t o walk thr ough the park without running acr oss some local indigenous r eptiles. Ubiquit ous tr opidurus lizar ds, which f eed on bird eggs, scamper ev erywhere. Colorful tr ee frogs hop and cr oak the nights away. Only patient and persist ent visit ors, ho wever, will disc over lar ger and rarer cr eatures, such as the 1.5m-long (5-f t.) t egu lizar d and the caiman, a crocodile-like reptile.

Warm-blooded cr eatures shar e this f orest as w ell. C oatis—aardvarklike mammals that tra vel in g roups sear ching f or insec ts and fruit—ar e fr equent and f earless visit ors t o the trails . S winging abo ve the f ootpaths ar e br own capuchin monkeys, whose chatter and gestures make them seem mor e human than most primat es. The pr edators of this warm-blooded g roup range fr om vampire bats t o endanger ed jaguars and pumas . F or y our safety, stay on the walking paths and, when you're in the jungle, with your tour operator.

An array of subtropical flora surrounds Iguazú's resident animals and insects. Bamboo, ficus, fig, and ancient r osewood tr ees—up t o 1,000 y ears old—ar e but a few of the trees that grow near the river and compete for light, along with a proliferation of epiphytes (plants growing on other plants), such as br omeliads, güembés, and or chids. Eight y-five species of or chid thriv e in the park , mostly close to the damp and well-lit waterfalls.

TREKKING & BIRD-WATCHING **Iguazú Forest** (see abo ve) will take y ou out with trained naturalists, wher e y ou can learn mor e about the bir ds and butter flies in the area.

HORSEBACK RIDING **Iguazú Adventure** (✆ **3757/15-679-475** [cell]) is located in front of the H otel Cataratas and combines a *Doble Aventura* of horseback riding and hiking, where you visit the indigenous reserve Yriapu. **Cabalgatas Ecológicas** (✆ **3757/421-543** or 3757/15-675-539 [cell]; www .cabalgatasecologicas.com) conducts 3-hour jungle circuits that cost $30 (£20).

FISHING **Iguazú Water Sports,** Town Port, Puerto Iguazú (✆ **3757/556-932**), organizes all-day fishing excursions, including riverside *asados* (barbecues), as well as other watersports.

What to See & Do Around Puerto Iguazú

La Aripuca, RN 12, Km 4.5, Puerto Iguazú (✆ **3757/423-488**), is a giant house made from fallen tree trunks, its design based on a primitive bird trap. It is located outside the town on the way to the park and worth a morning stroll, with a handicraft store selling everything from *mate*-flavored ice cream to leather goods. It is open every day from 8am to 7pm. **Indio Solitario,** Calle Jangadero 719, Puerto Iguazú (no phone), and **Jardín de Ozain,** Fray Luis Beltran 84, Puerto Iguazú (✆ **3757/421-302**), are two colorful orchid gardens located in the town. The latter is open from 8am to 6pm every day, while the former is open Tuesday to Saturday 9am until midday and 3 to 8pm. It is also open on Sunday from 9am to midday. Perhaps one of Iguazú's most eccentric sites is the **Plastic Bottle House,** RN 12, Km 5, Puerto Iguazú (✆ **3757/405-621**). The somewhat ugly bungalow made from recycled materials is just down the road from La Aripuca and worth a 20-minute stop and the $1.60 (£1.10) admission. **Guïrá Ogá Bird's House** ★, RN 12, Km 5, Puerto Iguazú (✆ **3757/423-980;** http://guiraoga.fundacionazara.org.ar), is an interesting animal refuge full of parrots, owls, and monkeys. Admission is $5 (£3.40). **Fortín M'Bororé** is a Guarani Indian community that now accept visits and reveals the secrets behind their ancient traditions of hunting, natural medicine, and handicrafts. Tours are organized by the agency **Cuenca del Plata** (✆ **3757/421-062;** www.cuencadelplata.com), with a significant share of the cost going toward social projects and medical assistance.

SHOPPING Feathered Guarani wander the town selling trinkets, and the principal streets are jammed with shops selling all types of tourist tat, from factory-produced *mate* gourds to dreamcatchers. Look hard enough though and you will find genuine, locally produced weavings and handicrafts. **Timbó Arte,** Av. Misiones 141, Puerto Iguazú (✆ **3757/422-698;** www.timboiguazu.com.ar), has everything from seeds to ceramics. **Patria Gaucha,** Victoria Aguirre 222, Puerto Iguazú (✆ **3757/423-469**), is perfect for those cowboy shoppers who want leather boots, jackets, and ponchos. **Claudia G,** Av. Brasil 154, Puerto Iguazú (✆ **3757/425-456**), specializes in wool and cotton goods, with a nice line in candles.

SPAS & WELLNESS CENTERS All that mud and humidity takes its toll, and after a long day in the jungle, your body will appreciate an hour in a sauna or on the massage slab. **Spa de la Selva,** Route 12, Km 5 (✆ **3757/420-057**), is a charming garden facility beside the Orquídeas Palace, offering everything from manicures to yoga sessions. For somewhere closer to town, try **Vergel Iguazú Relax,** Bonpland 111, Puerto Iguazú (✆ **3757/421-733**), a small street clinic with hot stone massage and aromatherapy baths. Most of the high-end hotels have in-house spas that welcome nonguests—the most notable in town being the **Hotel Saint George,** Av. Córdoba 148, Puerto Iguazú (✆ **3757/420-633;** www.hotelsaintgeorge.com).

WHERE TO STAY

Puerto Iguazú has witnessed a hotel boom in recent years, with some excellent budget options in the town and more upscale operations appearing on the road to the park. Peak season for hotels in Iguazú extends through January and February (summer holiday) and also includes July (winter break), Semana Santa (Holy Week, the week before Easter),

and long weekends. On the Argentine side, the Sheraton Internacional Iguazú is the only hotel inside the national park. Discounts are common in the off season.

Expensive

Hotel Cataratas ★ (Kids) None of the stuffiness you sometimes feel at luxury hotels is evident here. Despite the hotel's unimpressive exterior, rooms are among the most modern and spacious in the area—especially the 30 "master rooms" that feature two double beds, handsome wood furniture, colorful artwork, large bathrooms with separate toilet rooms, in-room safes, and views of the pool or gardens. These rooms are only slightly more than the standard rooms, called "superior." The hotel's many facilities, including an outdoor pool, spa, tennis and volleyball courts, putting green, playroom, and gymnasium, make this a great choice for families. The Cataratas restaurant offers a fine selection of regional and international dishes, and you can dine inside or out. The hotel lies 4km (2 1/2 miles) from the center of Puerto Iguazú and 17km (11 miles) from the national park entrance. Bus service is available.

RN 12, Km 4, 3370 Misiones. ✆ **3757/421-100.** Fax 3757/421-090. www.hotelcataratas.com. 130 units. $185 (£125) double superior; from $250 (£170) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; putting green; tennis court; gymnasium; spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; playroom; game room; concierge; secretarial services; room service; massage; laundry service; conference room; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Iguazú Grand Hotel Resort & Casino ★ (Kids) Some of my pickiest friends have stayed here and could not fault it. The large, red-brick, mansion-style hotel sits on a low slope with lawns running down to an attractive pool area. The lobby is stunning and elegant, with white pillars and sparkling marble floors. What makes this five-star hotel stand out from the rest are its rooms, or should we say suites; they do not do rooms. Even the junior suites have 40 sq. m (431 sq. ft.) worth of impeccable decor, stylish period furniture, and ample light. The immaculate bathrooms have two washbasins and a separate section for toilet and bidet. A delicious fruit drink awaits you upon arrival, as do a fresh bathrobe and pair of slippers. All the bathtubs have a hydro-massage. The hotel grounds are delightful, and the three pools are immaculate and well maintained. The breakfast buffet is superb, with a large variety of international dishes. A car service is available to all guests, charging a very reasonable $5 (£3.40) flat rate to all the local attractions. It is located on the road to the falls.

RN 12, Km 1640, 3370 Puerto Iguazú. ✆ **3757/498-050.** www.casinoiguazu.com. 120 units. $350 (£238) junior suite; $455 (£307) garden suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; casino; 3 outdoor pools; putting green; tennis court; health club; spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; playland; game room; concierge; car service; business center; secretarial services; shopping arcade; room service; massage; babysitter; laundry service; conference room. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Sheraton Internacional Iguazú (Overrated) How on earth this type writer-shaped bunker got to be built in a nature reserve is anybody's guess. The Sheraton enjoys a magnificent and exclusive location inside the national park (read: It's the *only* hotel inside the park). Guests have little need to leave the resort, and you have the added advantage of being able to explore the park when the daily crowds have left. The hotel is only steps from the Upper and Lower circuit trails, and half of the guest rooms have direct views of the water (the others have splendid views of the jungle). The only drawback to the rooms is that the decor is fairly standard Sheraton-issue. Service can be patchy, with forgotten wake up calls not unheard of. Three restaurants vie for the world's best restaurant view, with the main one peering over Devil's Throat. It serves pricey international dishes.

Parque Nacional Iguazú, 3370 Misiones. ✆ **0800/888-9180** (local toll-free), or 3757/491-800. Fax 3757/491-848. www.sheraton.com. 180 units. $300 (£204) double with jungle view; $368 (£250) double with view of waterfalls; from $489 (£332) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; outdoor and indoor pools; 2 tennis courts; fitness center; spa; concierge; car-rental desk; shopping arcade; room service; babysitting; laundry service; basketball court; conference rooms; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Moderate

Boutique Hotel de la Fonte This hotel was one of the more interesting accommodations options I could find in town, a beautiful garden hotel with ample grounds and excellent food. From the street it looks like any well-to-do residential home, and, indeed, staying there feels like a weekend sojourn with your Argentine cousins. The rooms are a little old-fashioned with low beds and heavy curtains, but it's the rambling garden that makes the place. A marble fountain trickles in the shady corners. A red-tiled patio overlooks a medium-size pool with tall palm trees acting as sentries over the hot tub. The Italian owners are talented chefs, which comes through in the incredible menu that can be enjoyed in intimate corners of the garden. Boutique Hotel de la Fonte is located on a quiet, residential street just a 5-minute walk from the downtown area.

1 de Mayo and Corrientes s/n, Puerto Iguazú, Misiones ✆ **3757/420-625.** www.bhfboutiquehotel.com. 8 units. $120 (£81) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; hot tub; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

Esturión Hotel & Lodge Hotel Esturión is spacious, well equipped, and just a 10-minute walk from the town center. The main building has the look of a modern, tropical schoolhouse, but, in general, the facilities have a pleasing aesthetic. The huge pool and surrounding grounds have a Caribbean feel, though the safari-style staff uniforms are a little over-the-top. Rooms are decent, if a little functional and dated, and some have pleasant balconies. The lobby bar is very stylish and appealing. Service can be patchy, however; some staff members are helpful and efficient, and others are plain rude. Do not expect much English. The grounds are as expansive as the breakfast buffet, which is an excellent spread, and the food in general is good—particularly the *asado* (Argentine barbecue).

Av. Tres Fronteras 650, 3370 Puerto Iguazú. ✆ **3757/420-100.** Fax 3757/421-468. www.hotelesturion.com. 128 units. $203 (£138) double; $290 (£197) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

Hotel Saint George ★★ Finds Undoubtedly the finest hotel located in the town center, the Saint George is a modern cream-colored block with delightful bird of paradise plants outside and an inviting, spacious lobby of marble floors and striped furniture inside. Recently renovated, the new master rooms are much larger than the old standard rooms and worth the extra $10 (£6.80). Sleek flatscreen TVs go nicely with the stylish black minibars, while outside you'll find old telephone operators' desks and pianos gracing corridors that lead to a lush, ample courtyard with a large kidney-shaped pool. The bathrooms are big, with glass-enclosed showers and separate tubs. Service can be patchy but is more than made up for with an excellent breakfast buffet. The family-owned hotel has one of the best eateries in town, known as La Esquina, and is located on one of the principal streets, a short stroll from many restaurants, stores, and the bus terminal.

Av. Córdoba 148, 3370 Puerto Iguazú. ✆ **3757/420-633.** Fax 3757/420-651. www.hotelsaintgeorge.com. 100 units. $103 (£70) double; $123 (£83) double with dinner included; $138 (£93) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; sauna; play-room; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

La Aldea de la Selva ★ A sleek wooden walkway leads you through the jungle to a stylish and comfortable boutique hotel that is conveniently located 7km (4 1/3 miles) from downtown Puerto Iguazú on the way to the falls. A brilliant blue terraced pool with three levels is surrounded by wooden decking and greenery. The rooms have pine walls and teak flooring that lead to wide wraparound balconies with thick wooden rails you can lean on and touch the jungle. The bathrooms are immaculate and luxurious, with tiled walls and gleaming-white wash bowls and tubs. Opened in 2008, La Aldea is Iguazú's latest accommodations offering and adds a modern, stylish choice to the range of options. In tune with the times, there is an on-site organic vegetable and herb garden and two Jacuzzis. It is perfect for those who want to be romanced and pampered.

Selva Iriapú s/n, Puerto Iguazú, Misiones ✆ **3757/425-777.** www.laaldeadelaselva.com. 8 units. $165 (£112) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

Orquídeas Palace This resort-style hotel with manicured lawns and low modern buildings has a pared-down, functional feel. At the same time, it's pleasant and relaxing. The decor is simple and elegant, if a little worn around the edges. It has a glass-fronted reception area with comfy couches and well-lit, spacious rooms with tiled floors and small window tables. The fixtures and features, however, could use updating. The bathrooms are all ceramic and clean, with showers and tubs. The 5-hectare (12-acre) garden offers lots of greenery with fruit-laden trees, lush shrubbery, and tropical flowers. A cool, lagoon-shaped pool has deck chairs. Set amid the well-trimmed grounds are some very agreeable cottages with white walls and tiled roofs. Some are older than others and priced accordingly. Beds vary from queen-size to double bunk, and the interiors are well presented with attractive drapes and bed covers. The hotel is on the road to the falls. Buses pass frequently in either direction.

RN 12, Km 5, 3370 Puerto Iguazú. ✆ **3757/420-472.** Fax 3757/420-651. www.orquideashotel.com. 80 units. $106 (£72) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; Wi-Fi. In room: A/C, TV, minibar.

Inexpensive

Hosteria Los Helechos (Value) This is the best budget choice located in the heart of town. The pale-yellow building has a simple design but a cozy feel, with wooden window frames looking in on a large lobby complete with a tropical fish tank. The rooms are pretty basic, but some have windows framed in greenery overlooking a plant-filled courtyard. All have air-conditioning but incur an extra charge of $10 (£5.50) if it's used. The breakfast room is somewhat plain, but clean, and the common room is an inviting mix of big sofas, ceiling fans, and red-brick walls.

Paulino Amarante 76, 3370 Puerto Iguazú. ✆/fax **3757/420-338.** www.hosterialoshelechos.com.ar. 60 units. $55 (£37) with A/C and TV. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool, Internet computer in lobby. *In room:* A/C, TV..

Hotel Lilian (Value) Somewhat stark and plain and eerily quiet during the day, the Hotel Lilian is a budget hotel that could do with a little more—perhaps some pictures on the walls and some plants out front. However it is perfectly suitable for those just passing through for a night or two, and the price is a good value. Situated on a quiet residential street that is 5 minutes from downtown, it has a big light-filled lobby and rooms that are somewhat small and dark, yet clean and comfortable. The all-important air-conditioning works just fine, as do the modern open showers in the small bathrooms.

The plain interior design contrasts with a lush inner courtyard that, sadly, lacks a pool. The staff is a little shy, which all adds to the hotel's low-key vibe.

Fray Luis Beltran 183, 3370 Puerto Iguazú. ✆/fax **3757/420-968.** hotelliliana@yahoo.com.ar. 24 units. $42 (£28) double. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** Internet computer in lobby. In room: A/C, TV.

Residencial Uno Hostel This big, rambling building has mismatching tiles and a thrown-together feel, with a water tank precariously perched high atop the roof. The rooms are basic and come in doubles and dorms. The lobby is dark, cool, and spacious, with an excellent collection of 400 movies in the adjoining common room to while away those hot afternoons. Its main attraction, however, is the large garden with a good-size pool. Owners Valeria and Dayan speak good English and are very helpful regarding tips on what to do in the area. The hostel is located on a quiet residential street 5 minutes from the town center.

Beltran 116, Puerto Iguazú. ✆ **3757/420-529.** 23 units. $28 (£19) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Bar; pool; high-speed Internet; Wi-Fi.

Timbó Posada Finds This miniature hostel is for those who like a touch of jungle charm. The dinky little street entrance attracts your attention with a brilliant yellow wall lit up with flowers. A tiny lobby leads to a beautiful garden with wooden platforms and a small pool. Hammocks hang amid greenery in front of a lovely wooden veranda. Everything is small, compact, and shady, including the rooms and their tiny, basic bathrooms. It is is located on a street several blocks from the downtown area and close to the bars of Calle Brazil.

Av. Misiones 157, Puerto Iguazú. ✆/fax **3757/422-698.** www.timboiguazu.com.ar. 5 units. $50 (£34) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool; Wi-Fi.

Outside Iguazú

Yacutinga Lodge This is the ultimate jungle experience. The fact that you have to make the last leg of the journey there by boat makes you anticipate not so much the heart of darkness, but the heart of another world—a world of giant butterflies, dazzling birds, and hidden jaguars. It is a world where five-star comforts do not exist, so be prepared. But the sacrifices you make (such as hard beds, limited menu, and patchy service) are worth it for a memorable experience. The Yacutinga Lodge is set in 570 hectares (1,410 acres) of *Jungle Book* paradise, run to ensure that its presence has no negative effects on the surrounding environment; you even get to plant a tree before leaving. The decor might look pseudo-Flintstone, but the chunky wood, adobe walls, and tiny colored glass windows are all made from recycled material. Even the coffee table is a discarded tree trunk, redesigned so you can put your fruit juice on it. Set amid this Eden-like Utopia are four-room cabins with decent-size rooms and a wood-fueled fireplace (June–Aug mornings can be chilly). The decor is basic, and don't expect air-conditioning. The constant mud, humidity, and water (Wellingtons provided) are not for everyone, but the experience is unforgettable. The lodge is 60km (37 miles) from Iguazú Falls.

Iguazú, Missiones. No phone. www.yacutinga.com. 12 units. $500 (£340) for 3 days/2 nights. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool; Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE

Dining in Puerto Iguazú is casual and inexpensive, provided you look for a meal outside your hotel. Meat, pasta, and pizza are the standard fare, and it does not change much

between venues. Take advantage of the good river fish you find in the area, mainly *surubí,* pacu, and dorada, although availability depends on the season.

Expensive

El Quincho del Tío Querido ★★ PARRILLA Located in the heart of town, this restaurant serves excellent *parrilla* and fresh river fish such as dorado or *surubí,* along with excellent wines. Open for nearly 20 years, the restaurant also offers live music, including tango and *folklórico.* Shows start every night at 8pm.

Bonpland 110, at Perito Moreno. ✆ **3757/420-151.** Main courses $15–$18 (£10–£12). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 7pm–midnight.

La Esquina Restaurante Finds ARGENTINE This handsome restaurant, located in the Saint George hotel, has the most interesting menu around, including dorado fish al Roquefort and boga fish with lemon sauce. There is a grand central buffet with an excellent salad bar, and it can be all washed down by wine from a very decent wine list. Try the Patagonian pinot noir Humberto Canale, and you'll be pleasantly surprised. The decor is open, with orange walls and stylish yellow lamps hanging over the bar area. It's a pleasant, upscale restaurant that's perfect for a romantic dinner.

Av. Córdoba 148. ✆ **3757/420-633.** www.hotelsaintgeorge.com. Main courses $15–$18 (£10–– £12). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–1am.

Moderate

El Charo Finds ARGENTINE Large and somewhat soulless, El Charo produces delicious food and is tremendously popular with tourists and locals alike. Among the main dishes, you'll find breaded veal, sirloin steaks, pork chops, catfish, and items from the *parrilla.* Also available are salads and pastas such as ravioli and cannelloni.

Av. Córdoba 106. ✆ **3757/421-529.** Main courses $9–$16 (£6.10–£11). No credit cards. Daily 11am–1am.

La Rueda ★ Finds ARGENTINE Nothing more than a small A-frame house with an outdoor patio built from local materials, La Rueda is a delightful place to eat. Despite the casual atmosphere, tables have carefully prepared place settings, waiters are attentive and friendly, and the food—served in large portions—is very good. The diverse menu features pasta, steaks, and fish dishes. Try the *surubí brochette,* a local whitefish prepared with bacon, tomatoes, onions, and peppers, and served with green rice and potatoes.

Av. Córdoba 28. ✆ **3757/422-531.** Main courses $9–$16 (£6–£11). AE. Daily noon–midnight.

Inexpensive

Color ARGENTINE The name and rainbow-style logo may look like that of a photography shop, but Color is one of Iguazú's most popular restaurants and is jammed at night, mostly with tourists. The large and airy indoor part is modern and attractive with lime green tablecloths and a large tree growing through the roof. Outside, there is a street-side courtyard with wooden decking and lots of seating. The stage at one end accommodates live bands at the weekend, and it can get rather noisy. Try the Argentine favorite *milanesa*—a thick slab of grilled beef or chicken dipped in bread crumbs. Color is located close to the town center next to the bus terminal.

Av. Córdoba 135. ✆ **3757/420-206.** Main courses $10–$15 (£6.80–£10). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–11:30pm.

El Patio Value PARRILLA El Patio looks and feels like you are in an aircraft hangar. It consists of a huge, not-so-pretty shed right in the center of town, with an open grill smoldering to the left as you walk in. Such "open planning" is not off-putting in the slightest, and is more than compensated by the giant portions of meat that keep coming until you are full. The "tenedor libre" (eat as much as you can) is the best value in town and comes in at around $10 (£5.50) per person. Just ask for a *parrilla,* and the traditional *asado* (barbecue) appears on a sizzling minigrill heaped with sausage, blood sausage, steak, and chicken. The lone waiter is friendly, efficient, and eager to push that last rib on you, so much so you can hardly make the short walk to your hotel afterward.

Av. Victoria Aguirre 221. ✆ **3757/424-167.** Main courses $10–$13 (£6.80–£8.80). No credit cards. Daily 11am–1am.

Gustos del Litoral ★ ARGENTINE This is a tiny sidewalk restaurant with lots of character. There is room for only three tables inside and a little more in the wooden framed veranda outside. There is a chalk mural on the inside wall, and the menus come covered in bamboo shoots. Jazz plays in the background as you eat your way through local river dishes such as pacu fish with lemon sauce and saffron flavored rice. Small but colorful, it makes a pleasant change from the mammoth touristy joints this town specializes in. Portions could be bigger.

Av. Misiones 209. No phone. Main courses $12–$16 (£8.20–£11). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 8am–11:30pm.

Il Fratello ARGENTINE With its big windows overlooking a tidy wooden street deck of wine-colored tablecloths and dark furniture, Il Fratello seems a more stylish and compact restaurant than its tacky neighbors. Located in the heart of the downtown area on a busy street, the restaurant has both an informal outside area, with comfy deck-chair seating, and a more formal indoors, with two TVs. Still, it is nice to have cloth napkins for a change instead of the shiny, nonabsorbent serviettes that seem the staple of restaurants up and down the country. Il Fratello offers standard fare in giant portions. The *surubí* fish I ordered was easily three times bigger than any I received in other restaurants and quite delicious.

Gustavo Eppens 294. ✆ **3757/424-157.** Main courses $10–$15 (£6.80–£10). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–11:30pm.

PUERTO IGUAZU AFTER DARK

Although it has improved somewhat in recent years, Puerto Iguazú's nightlife is nothing to get your disco flares in a twist about. Most of the bigger restaurants stage live traditional music at weekends, while a series of new, youthful bars has popped up along Avenida Brasil, offering late-night alfresco drinking. The slickest of these disco bars is **Jackie Brown,** Av. Brasil 180 (✆ **3757/421-208**). The designer-white seating inside goes well with the designer-chrome seating outside. This place rocks to techno all weekend until 5am, with a more eclectic mix of pop during the week. Across the street is the more laid-back **La Tribu** ★, Av. Brasil 155 (✆ **3757/421-794**), with tropical Latin beats reverberating around a stylish deck and inside bar with black leather seating. It is open every day from 6pm to 2am. Even more chilled out is **Puerto Bambu,** Av. Brasil 96 (✆ **3757/421-900**). This is a large corner bar with a giant bamboo veranda and a reggae music list that goes well with frequent happy hours. It is open every day from 5pm to 3am. **Cuba Libre,** at Paraguay and Brazil (no phone; cubalibre_iguazu@yahoo.com.ar), has been around the longest and plays tropical beats until late.

2 THE BRAZILIAN SIDE: FOZ DO IGUAÇU ★★

A visit to the Brazilian side of Iguazú Falls affords a dazzling perspective on the waterfalls. Trails here are not as extensive as on the Argentine side, but the views are no less spectacular. In fact, many people find Brazil's unobstructed panoramic view of Iguazú Falls even more inspiring.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

BY PLANE **Foz do Iguaçu Airport** (✆ **4535/214-200**) is 11km (6¾ miles) from Foz do Iguaçu, on the Brazilian side. **Airport Varig** (✆ **4535/214-292**), **Gol** (✆ **4535/214-230**), and **TAM** (✆ **4535/214-242**) fly there from Rio de Janeiro and other major Brazilian cities. Public buses make frequent trips to the national park and into town for a small fee.

FROM THE ARGENTINE SIDE For most nationalities, crossing the border is fairly easy with a passport. Citizens of the United States, Canada, and Australia must obtain a visa to visit Brazil. The visa costs $120 (£81); see "Border Crossing," below). The most convenient way to get from the Argentine to the Brazilian side is by taxi (about $35–$40/£24–£27 round-trip). Buses are considerably less expensive, but less convenient, too. **Tres Fronteras** and **El Práctico** buses make the half-hour trip to Foz do Iguaçu 15 times per day ($3/£2) from the Puerto Iguazú bus terminal; to visit the National Park, ask the bus driver to let you off just after the border check, then catch the National Park bus.

BY CAR To avoid border hassles and international driving issues, it's best to take a bus or taxi to the Brazilian side.

Visitor Information

Foz do Iguaçu's **municipal tourism office,** at Praça Getúlio Vargas (✆ **4535/211-455;** www.fozdoiguacu.pr.gov.br), is open weekdays from 9am to 5pm. **Teletur** (✆ **0800/454-516**) is a toll-free information service that operates from 7am to 11pm.

SEEING THE BRAZILIAN SIDE OF THE FALLS

The national park entrance to the **Cataratas do Iguaçu** is at Km 17, Rodovía das Cataratas, and the entrance fee is $8.50 (£5.75). Park your car or get off the bus here, and pay your entry fee; private vehicles (except for taxis and guests of the Tropical) are not allowed in the park. From here, you board a shuttle bus bound for the falls. The waterfall path begins just in front of the Tropical das Cataratas Hotel and Resort, which is 11km (6¾ miles) from the national park entrance (if you are taking a taxi, have your driver bring you directly to the Tropical das Cataratas hotel and jump onto the trail from here). You will catch your first sight of the falls from a small viewpoint at the foot of the hotel lawn, from which the path begins. The trail zigzags down the side of the gorge and trundles along the cliff face for about 2km (1.25 miles) past **Salto Santa María, Deodoro,** and **Floriano** falls. There are 275 separate waterfalls with an average drop of 60m (197 ft.). The last catwalk plants you directly in front of the awesome **Garganta do Diablo (Devil's Throat),** where, once again, you will get wet (there's a small store in front where you can buy rain gear and film, if you need it). Back on the main trail, a tower beckons visitors to take an elevator to the top for an even broader panoramic view

Border Crossing

There is currently much confusion among American travelers concerning what their visa requirements are to enter the Brazilian side of the falls They hear they are required to get a $120 (£82) visa in advance, yet they get there to find American citizens crossing the border without hindrance. Indeed, the law says that citizens from the United States, Canada, and Australia must obtain a visa to enter Brazil, whether for 1 day or 90 days. On the ground, however, some local officials, hotel concierges, tourist agencies, and taxi companies ignore the rule to make an extra buck. Rules are rules, however, and it is illegal to enter a country without the proper papers. If you want to see the Brazilian side of Iguazú Falls, my advice is to get a visa.

You can obtain one on short notice in Puerto Iguazú. Visit the **Brazilian Consulate,** Av. Córdoba 264 (✆ **3757/421-348;** Mon–Fri 8am–1pm). The process takes 2 hours and requires a passport photo. You can also apply before traveling, which takes 2 weeks. **U.S. citizens** should contact the Brazilian Embassy at 3006 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington DC 20008 (✆ **202/238-2700;** www.brasilemb.org). **Canadian citizens** must contact the Brazilian Embassy at 450 Wilbroad St., Ottawa, ON K1N 6M8 (✆ **613/237-1090;** www.brasembottawa.org). **Australian citizens** contact their Brazilian Embassy, at 19 Forster Crescent, Yarralumla, ACT 2600 (✆ **02/6237-2375;** http://brazil.org.au).

of the falls. This circuit takes about 2 hours. As you are leaving the park, drop into the **Parque das Aves,** Rodovia das Aves Km 18 (✆ **4535/298-282;** www.parquedasaves.com.br), a fascinating bird park with large walk-through aviaries holding toucans, egrets, and roseate spoonbills. Admission is $15 (£10), and the park is open every day from 8:30am to 5:30pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Peak season is January and February (summer holiday), July (winter break), Semana Santa (Holy Week, the week before Easter Sunday), and all long weekends. Rates are often substantially discounted in the off season. Foz do Iguaçu is the main town for accommodations, a somewhat seedier version of its Argentine equivalent.

Expensive

Bourbon Cataratas Convention Resort ★★ (Kids) A full-service resort hotel, the Bourbon is 2.5km (1½ miles) out of town on the road to the falls. All rooms are colorfully appointed; standard rooms in the original wing have light colors and look out over the front of the hotel, while superior rooms have verandas with views over the pool and lawn. The newer wing houses "master" suites with modern furnishings and huge windows. But don't count on spending a lot of time in your room; the real draw of the Bourbon is its leisure space. There's a 1.3km (.8-mile) trail in the woods behind the hotel; keep an eye out for toucans, parakeets, and the colorful butterflies in the aviary. The vast outdoor pool area includes three large pools—one especially for children, with lots of

Esteros del Ibera

The locals turn out in style to greet you in Esteros del Ibera. Southern screamers, red crested cardinals, giant wood rails, storks, cormorants, and kingfishers are just some of the 300 feathered creatures that don their finest plumage — red eye patches, crimson collars, yellow-tipped wings, scarlet hats, and orange headbands in what is nature's version of Carnaval, except it takes place year-round. They swoop, scuttle, scamper, and dive in an acrobatic show of nature that demands a camera with telescopic lens and no time delay.

And that is just what happens in the sky. Bathing in this amazing 2m- deep (6½-ft.) marshland are multitudes of the large blunt-headed rodents known as capybaras. They have family picnics at the edge of floating islands watched by grinning caiman and growling howler monkeys. Yellow-backed anaconda slip between the water reeds, while turtles sleep at the feet of graceful marsh deer that trod gently around lily pads the size of large frying pans.

Esteros del Ibera is a 13,000-sq.-km (5,019-sq.-mile) trough of remarkable wildlife running up the middle of Corrientes, the next province south of Misiones. Dominated by two lakes, Laguna de Luna and Laguna Ibera, it is a morass of waterways and vegetation, with wide-open spaces perfect for a spot of nature spotting. Spectacular sunsets are just the opening act to incredible night skies, and the utter peace and tranquillity demand that you stay for at least 2 or 3 days.

Most people choose to stay in the sleepy settlement of **Colonia Carlos Pellegrini.** It is a quiet, unassuming place of baked brick huts surrounded by water and accessible over an old wooden bridge. Here you'll find some well-appointed lodges that offer all-inclusive 3- or 4-day deals, including daily

play equipment. In high season, activity leaders organize all-day children's activities in the pool or in the Tarzan house, tucked away in the forest.

Rodovía das Cataratas, Km 2.5, Foz do Iguaçu. ✆ **0800/451-010** or 4535/290-123. www.bourbon.com.br. 311 units. $236 (£160) double. Prices include breakfast and dinner. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 3 pools; outdoor tennis courts; sauna; tour desk; room service; laundry service; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet (master suites only), minibar, fridge, hair dryer, safe.

Tropical das Cataratas Hotel & Resort ★★ The Portuguese colonial hotel, located in the Brazilian National Park, is a UNESCO-declared World Heritage Site. The meticulously kept pink-and-white buildings, on a cliff above the Brazilian falls, are often fully booked, but if you can get a reservation, its spacious corridors and quiet courtyards promise a relaxing vacation. Deluxe and superior rooms, fitted with two-poster beds, granite- or marble-top tables, and hardwood floors, are far better than standard rooms; make sure you ask for one that has been refurbished, so you don't get stuck with a 50-year-old bathroom. The hotel has two commendable restaurants serving Brazilian and international food. Restaurante Itaipú is the more formal choice, while the outdoor Ipe Bar & Grill offers evening entertainment.

excursions by boat, canoe, horse, or rubber dinghy to explore the area. **Posada de la Laguna** (✆ **3773/499-413;** www.posadadelalaguna.com) is a simple, hacienda-style house with beautifully decorated rooms. Doubles start at $150 (£102) per night. **Hosteria Ñandé Retá** (✆ **3773/499-411;** www.nandereta.com) is a little more old-fashioned but has lots of space. **Posada A guape** (✆ **11/4742-3015** in Buenos Aires, or 3773/499-412 in Corrientes; www.iberaesteros.com.ar) is an upscale facility comprised of four houses with a lakeside location. Here you can stay for 3 days and 2 nights, food and excursions included, for $384 (£261) per person. **Lodge Irupé** (✆ **3752/438-312;** www.irupelodge.com.ar) has palm-fronded wood cabins with large decks to enjoy the sunset. Here a double room costs $90 (£61).

Like many of Argentina's most fascinating places, getting there can be a problem. There are direct flights from Buenos Aires to Corrientes city and Posadas, but a 5-hour transfer to the park is still required. Colonia Carlos Pellegrini itself is 740km (460 miles) from B.A. You can catch an overnight 8-hour bus from Buenos Aires to Mercedes, which is the nearest large town. Recommended bus companies are **Aguila Dorada Bis** (✆ **11/4311-3700**) and **El Cometa** (✆ **11/4313-7872**). Tickets cost $40 (£27) from Buenos Aires to Mercedes, and the journey takes 8 hours. From Mercedes, you can organize a private transport through your hotel to Colonia Carlos Pellegrini, which is 120km (75 miles) away and takes 3 hours. **El Rayo** (✆ **3773/420-184**) operates a daily minibus service between Colonia Pellegrini and Mercedes costing $4 (£2.70). It is possible to drive there from Puerto Iguazú or Posadas, but the journey is best done in a 4WD vehicle.

Parque Nacional do Iguaçu, Foz do Iguaçu. ✆ **0800/150-006** or 4521/027-000. www.tropicalhotel.com.br. 200 units. $400 (£270) superior; $440 (£297) deluxe. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; large outdoor pool; tennis court; concierge; tour desk; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, fridge, hair dryer, safe.

Moderate

Hotel Continental Inn ★ Finds

The Continental Inn is a gem. All the rooms are quite comfortable, but the suites are truly outstanding, well worth the extra money. The regular suites have beautiful hardwood floors, modern blond-wood furniture, a separate sitting area, a desk, a table, and a bathroom with a large round tub. The best rooms in the house are the master suites: hardwood floors, king-size bed, fancy linens, a large desk, a separate sitting area, a walk-in closet, and a bathroom with a Jacuzzi tub and a view over the city of Iguaçu. The amenities are top-notch, too: a large pool with children's play area, sauna, and game room with video games.

Av. Paranà 1089, Foz do Iguaçu, 85852-000 PR. ✆ **4521/2102-3033.** www.continentalinn.com.br. 124 units. $145 (£99) double. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; large pool; exercise room; sauna; game room; car-rental desk; room service; laundry service; free parking, Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, minibar, fridge, hair dryer, safe, Jacuzzi (in some).

WHERE TO DINE

You will find a number of pleasant restaurants in Foz do Iguaçu. **Avenida Brasil,** a main artery of the town, is a good place to wander for food stalls, coffee bars, and hearty home-style Brazilian fare. For bars and clubs, go to Avenida Jorge Schimmelpfeng. **Restaurante Itaipú—Tropical das Cataratas** ★, Tropical das Cataratas Hotel and Resort, Km 28, Parque Nacional do Iguaçu (✆ **4521/027-000**), serves great *feijoada* (a Brazilian black-bean dish) in an elegant colonial-style restaurant. Main courses start at $30 (£20). **Clube Maringá,** Avenida Dourado, just off Avenida General Meira, by the Policia Militar (✆ **4535/273-472**), is a seafood restaurant popular with locals. It can be a bit tricky to find, on a dead-end road that leads to the Brazilian border. Try the *piapara* fish grilled in a banana leaf or the barbecued dorado for $15 (£10).**Búfalo Branco,** Rua Reboucas, Foz do Iguaçu (✆ **4535/239-744**), is the best *parrilla* in town. **Zaragoza,** Rua Quintino Bocaiúva 882 (✆ **4535/743-084**), is a good seafood alternative.

8

Salta & the Northwest

by Charlie O'Malley

Red deserts, dusty adobe villages, and sparkling white churches are what you'll find in the northwestern part of Argentina. You might indeed think you were in Bolivia or Peru as you savor the indigenous flair of a place steeped in history. Here you'll find the ruins of ancient civilizations—be it the terraced settlements of the Quilmes Indians or the mysterious standing stones of the Tafi tribe. You can gaze upon the wonderful baroque art and colonial splendor of Salta city. You can follow the narrative of the glorious Gaucho Wars that beat off the Spanish and then gave rise to their own strongmen, such as Martín Güemes and Julio A. Roca. And here begins RN 40, that epic Andean roadway that forms the backbone of Argentina. In the Northwest alone it passes by vineyards, cactus hills, rainforests, tobacco fields, sugar-cane country, dinosaur parks, and vast empty salt plains. All this and more make the Northwest of Argentina the very heart of South America.

EXPLORING THE REGION

The Northwest is best explored by car. Although there is bus service between most towns, a car allows you to explore at ease the rainbow-colored mountain ranges of **Humahuaca** or the rugged scenery of **Calchaquíes Valley.** Be prepared for long distances and hidden marvels off the beaten track, such as the Indian settlement of **Quilmes,** the breathtaking canyons of **Talampaya,** or the dinosaur remains of **Ischigualasto.** Most towns, such as **Salta** and **Tilcara,** are best explored by foot, and the wineries of **Cafayate** are easily accessed by bicycle. Three days at a minimum to 5 days should allow you enough time to experience the flavor of the region.

Another way to discover the Northwest is aboard the **Tren a las Nubes (Train to the Clouds)** ★, a daylong journey that takes you from Salta toward the Chilean border and back. It runs only from April to November. For more, see "The Train to the Clouds" below.

1 SALTA ★

90km (56 miles) S of San Salvador de Jujuy; 1,497km (928 miles) N of Buenos Aires; 1,268km (786 miles) N of Mendoza

With its cloistered nuns and gaucho waiters, gilded churches and mountain mummies, Salta province is a rich mix of all the things that make the Northwest so distinctive. Here the old meets the new, and the old wins. Time trips at a more rhythmic pace, like the hoof-clopping music *chacareras,* which pipes from every cafe and car. The city itself (pop. 500,000) is a sunny mix of colonial architecture; friendly, gracious people; colorful history; and indigenous pride. Conservative by nature, Salteños let their hair down during Carnaval (Mardi Gras), when thousands come out for a parade of floats celebrating the

region's history; water balloons are also tossed from balconies with great aplomb. Ringed by green hills and blessed with a cooler, more temperate climate, Salta City should be top of your list when you're visiting the area. (That is not to say it does not get hot. High season here is actually the winter months of Apr–Oct.)

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

I don't recommend making the long-distance drive to Argentina's Northwest; it's safer and much easier to fly or take the bus, and hire a car when you get there.

BY PLANE Flights land at **Martín Miguel De Güemes International Airport,** RN 51 (✆ 387/424-2904), 8km (5 1/4 miles) from the city center. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (✆ 0810/222-86527 or 387/431-0862; www.aerolineas.com.ar) flies three times a day, at 7am, 2:40pm, and 6:30pm. **Andes Líneas Aéreas** (✆ 0810/122-26337 or 387/424-9214; www.andesonline.com) flies from Buenos Aires at 8am every day (some flights make a stop in Córdoba) and **LAN** (✆ 387/424-8881; www.lan.com) flies twice a day, at midday and in the afternoon. Nonstop flights from Buenos Aires take 2 hours and cost between $200 and $210 (£136–£142) each way, depending on the season and availability. A shuttle bus travels between the airport and town for about $3 (£2) one-way; a taxi into town will run about $6 (£4.05).

BY BUS The **Terminal de Omnibus,** or central bus station, is at Avenida H. Yrigoyen and Abraham Cornejo (✆ **387/401-1143**). Buses arrive from Buenos Aires (18 hr.; $85/£57) and travel to San Salvador de Jujuy (2 1/2 hr.; $6/£4.05) and other cities in the region. **Chevalier** (✆ **387/431-2819**) and **La Veloz del Norte** (✆ **387/401-2164**) are the main bus companies.

Visitor Information

The tourism office, **Secretaría de Turismo de Salta,** Buenos Aires 93 (✆ **387/431-0950** or 387/431-0640; www.turismosalta.gov.ar), will provide you with maps and information on dining, lodging, and sightseeing in the region. It can also help you arrange individual or group tours. It's open every day from 9am to 9pm. In Buenos Aires, obtain information about Salta from the **Casa de Salta** in Buenos Aires, Sáenz Pena 933 (✆ **11/4326-1314**). It's open weekdays 10am to 6pm. A decent Internet source for the latest in Salta's wining-and-dining places is **www.infovipsalta.com**.

Fast Facts Salta

Currency Exchange Exchange money at the airport, at **Dinar Exchange,** Mitre and España (✆ **387/432-2600;** Mon–Fri 9am–1:30pm and 5–8pm; Sat 10am–3pm), or at **Banco de La Nación,** Mitre and Belgrano (✆ **387/431-1909;** Mon–Fri 9am–2pm). Traveler's checks can be changed at **Masventas,** España 666 (✆ **387/431-0298;** www.masventasnet.com.ar; Mon–Fri 9am–1:30pm and 5–8pm).

Emergency Dial ✆ **911** for police, ✆ **100** for fire, and ✆ **107** for an ambulance. The tourism police are located on Calle Mitre 23 (✆ **387/437-3199;** poltursalta@gobiernosalta.gov.ar).

Hospital Saint Bernard Hospital is at Dr. M. Boedo 69 (✆ **387/431-8320**).

Laundry **Sol de Mayo,** 25 de Mayo 755 (✆ **387/431-9718**), provides a same-day service with free delivery, as does **Florencia,** Ibazeta 640 (✆ **387/432-2048**).

Spanish Classes **Bien Argentina** (✆ **387/15-475-0679** [cell]; www.bien-argentino.com.ar) will hook you up with some local teachers.

Tour Operators Explore the region with **Saltur Turismo,** Caseros 485 (✆ **387/421-2012**), or **Incauca Turismo,** Mitre 274 Local 33 (✆ **387/422-7568;** www.incaucaturismo.com). **La Vinia,** Alberdi 453 (✆ **387/421-9099**), is a conventional agency that will help out with flights and packages all over Argentina. The tourist office also recommends English-speaking guides. **Ferro Turismo,** Buenos Aires 191 (✆ **387/431-5314;** www.ferroturismo.todowebsalta.com.ar), organizes bus excursions along the Tren a las Nubes railway as far as the famous La Polvorilla viaduct.

GETTING AROUND

Salta is small and easy to explore on foot, but be careful; drivers here are pedestrian-blind, and the summer sun in the afternoon can be stifling. The **Peatonal Florida** is Salta's pedestrian walking street—a smaller version of Calle Florida in Buenos Aires—where most of the city's shops are. The main sites are centered on **Plaza 9 de Julio,** with a monument to General Arenales in the center and a beautiful baroque cathedral at its edge. Built in 1858, the **Catedral** is considered Argentina's best-preserved colonial church. All the other attractions here, except the **Salta Tram** and the **Tren a las Nubes,** are within easy walking distance.

BY BUS ★ A great new innovation is **Bus Turistico Salta,** 20 de Febrero 796 (✆ **387/422-7798;** www.busturisticosalta.com), a shuttle service that takes visitors around the city in high-tech open-top buses. You can get on and off from any of the 14 stops and get the next bus that comes along, on average, every 25 minutes. The service starts at 9:30am and carries on until 8pm (with a pause from 1–4pm for siesta). Tickets cost $10 (£6.80) and can be bought on the bus when you board at any of the brightly painted stop signs. The route is as follows: Balcarce Street, Batalla de Salta, Palacio Legislativo, the Cathedral, Convento, Monumento a Quemes, Virrey, Portezuelo, Parque San Martín, La Viña, Paseo de los Poetas, the Mercado Artesanal, and Cabildo.

RENTING A CAR **Noa Rent a Car,** Buenos Aires 1 Local 6 (✆ **387/431-0740**), has subcompacts and four-wheel-drives. **Rentacar Noroeste,** Buenos Aires 88, Local 10 (✆ **387/421-8999;** www.rentacarnoroeste.com.ar), is located close by and offers reasonable rates. There are several car-rental offices on Caseros street and at the airport, most notably: **Hertz,** Caseros 374 (✆ **387/421-6785**), and the airport (✆ **387/24-0113**); **Avis,** Caseros 420 (✆ **387/421-2181**), and at the airport (✆ **387/424-2289**); and **Budget,** Caseros 421 (✆ **387/421-1953;** www.budget.com.ar). Rates range from $45 to $90 (£31–£61) per day.

RENTING A BICYCLE/MOTORBIKE **Pura Vida,** Mendoza 443 (no phone), rents bicycles for $12 (£8.20) for 24 hours. The store is open Monday to Saturday 9am to 1pm and 4 to 9pm. A passport is required as guarantee.

The Train to the Clouds

The **Tren a las Nubes (Train to the Clouds)** ★★★ is one of the world's great railroad experiences—a breathtaking ride that climbs to 4,220m (13,842 ft.) without the help of cable tracks. The journey takes you 434km (269 miles), through 21 tunnels and over 13 viaducts and 29 bridges, culminating in the stunning La Polvorilla viaduct. You will cross magnificent landscapes, making your way from the multicolored Lerma valley through the deep canyons and rugged peaks of the Quebrada del Toro and on to the desolate desert plateau of La Puña. The train stops at the peak, where your tour guide (there's one in each car) will describe the region's topography and check that everyone is breathing fine and not suffering from altitude sickness. In the small town of San Antonio de los Cobres, you'll have a chance to buy handicrafts, ponchos, and other textile goods from the indigenous people. The 15-hour ride includes a small breakfast, lunch, and a folkloric show with regional music and dance. A restaurant, post office, communications center, and infirmary are among the first-class passenger cars. The ride makes for a fascinating experience, but be prepared for a very long day, as departure is at 7am and the train returns at 11pm. Always check ahead, as cancellations are common.

For more information, contact **General Belgrano Train Station,** Ameghino and Balcarce (✆ **387/421-5658**), or **Tren a las Nubes Buenos Aires Office,** Av. Córdoba 650 (✆ **11/5246-6666;** www.trenalasnubes.com.ar). The train operates from April to November and departs Salta's General Belgrano Station.

Tickets cost $140 (£95), including breakfast and lunch, and can be purchased at any of Salta's conventional travel agencies.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

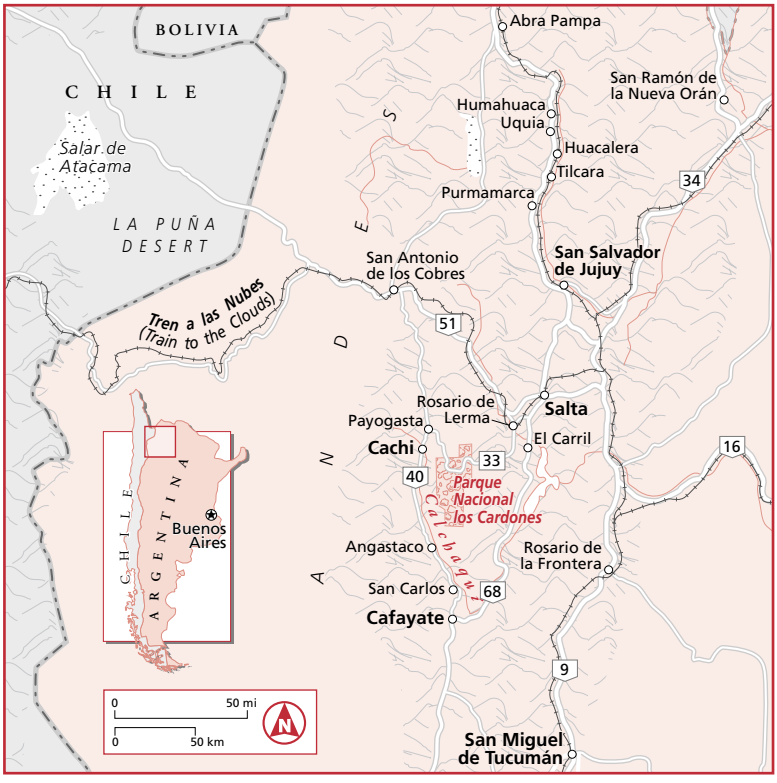
Most museums in the Northwest don't have formal admission fees; instead, they request small contributions, usually $1 (70p) or less.

Casa de la Cultura Salta's cultural center is a hive of activity, staging art exhibitions, dance performances, music recitals, and theater plays. The all-glass facade hides an old adobe structure that is a warren of galleries and spaces.

Caseros 460. ✆ **387/421-5763.** www.culturasalta.gov.ar. Daily 10am–1pm and 3–7:30pm (sometimes later depending on performances).

El Cabildo/Museo Histórico del Norte (Historical Museum of the North) First erected in 1582 when the city was founded, the Cabildo has since reinvented itself a number of times. The latest town hall was completed in 1783; typical of Spanish construction, it has two levels and a tower built around interior patios. The building houses the Museo Histórico del Norte (Historical Museum of the North), with 15 exhibition halls related to the Indian, Colonial, and Liberal periods of Salteño history. Here you will see religious and popular art, as well as works from the Jesuit period and from upper Peru.

Caseros 549. ✆ **387/421-5340.** www.museonor.gov.ar. Museum Tues–Fri 9:30am–1:30pm and 3:30–8:30pm; Sat 9:30am–1:30pm and 4:30–8pm; Sun 9:30am–1pm.



Iglesia San Francisco (San Francisco Church) ★★ Rebuilt in 1759 after a fire destroyed the original building, the Iglesia San Francisco is Salta's most prominent postcard image. The terra-cotta facade, with its 53m (174-ft.) tower and tiered white pillars, was designed by architect Luis Giorgi. The belfry—the tallest in the Americas—holds the Campana de la Patria, a bronze bell made from the cannons used in the War of Independence's Battle of Salta. A small museum exhibits a variety of 17th- and 18th-century religious images.

Córdoba and Caseros. No phone. Daily 8am–noon and 4–8pm.

Museo de Arqueológia de Alta Montaña (Andean Archaeological Museum) ★★★ A beautifully restored historic building, the MAAM houses a good collection of Andean textiles woven over the years. This museum is also home to a large research library dedicated to Andean culture and anthropology. The main focus of the museum, however, is its three mountain mummies, the perfectly preserved remains of three Inca children sacrificed to the gods. A fascinating film shows the excavations at Mount Llullaillaco, the highest volcanic peak in Argentina, near the Chilean border, which displays the actual extraction of the bodies from their mountain refuge. The Andean mummies (over 500 years old) were found in 1999 by a *National Geographic*

team of archaeologists, and MAAM was designed for their display. More than 100 other objects were found with the mummies—gold statues and other objects dating back to the Inca era, which will also slowly be featured over the coming years. Already, the locals are affectionately calling this place the *museo de las momias* (mummy museum). Plan to spend an hour here if you want to watch the 30-minute documentary. There is usually one mummy on display at any one moment, including a crouching girl struck by lightning.

Mitre 77. ✆ **387/437-0499.** www.maam.org.ar. Admission $5 (£3.40). Tues–Sun 9am–1pm and 4–9pm.

Museo Histórico José Evaristo Uriburu ★ José Evaristo Uriburu's family, which produced two Argentine presidents, bought this simple adobe house with a roof of reeds and curved tiles in 1810. The street entrance leads directly to a courtyard, characteristic of homes of this era. Exhibits include period furniture and costumes, as well as documents and objects belonging to the Uriburus and General Arenales.

Caseros 479. ✆ **387/421-5340.** Tues–Sat 9:30am–1:30pm and 3:30–8:30pm.

Museo Pajarito Velarde Guillermo Velarde Mors was one of Salta's most famous bohemians. His little town house was a must-see for any passing writers or artists in 1950s Salta. The quaint little corner cottage is now an interesting museum crammed with musical instruments, Bolivian Carnaval masks, vinyl records, and Independence-era weaponry. The enthusiastic guide, Carol Murgvizur, graciously reveals the literary and cultural legacy of the city as well as lets you try on a hat once worn by Carlos Gardel.

Pueyrredon 106. ✆ **387/421-2921.** Daily 9am–1pm and 3–7:30pm.

Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes de Salta (Museum of Fine Arts) ★ Colorfully decorated tapestries and other regional works fill this 18th-century Spanish house, which features a permanent collection of colonial art upstairs, and religious and contemporary art downstairs. Noteworthy pieces include a portrait of Francisco de Uriburu by Spanish painter Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, and a painting of Salta by Italian Carlo Penutti.

Florida 20. ✆ **387/421-4714.** Mon–Sat 9am–1pm and 4–8:30pm.

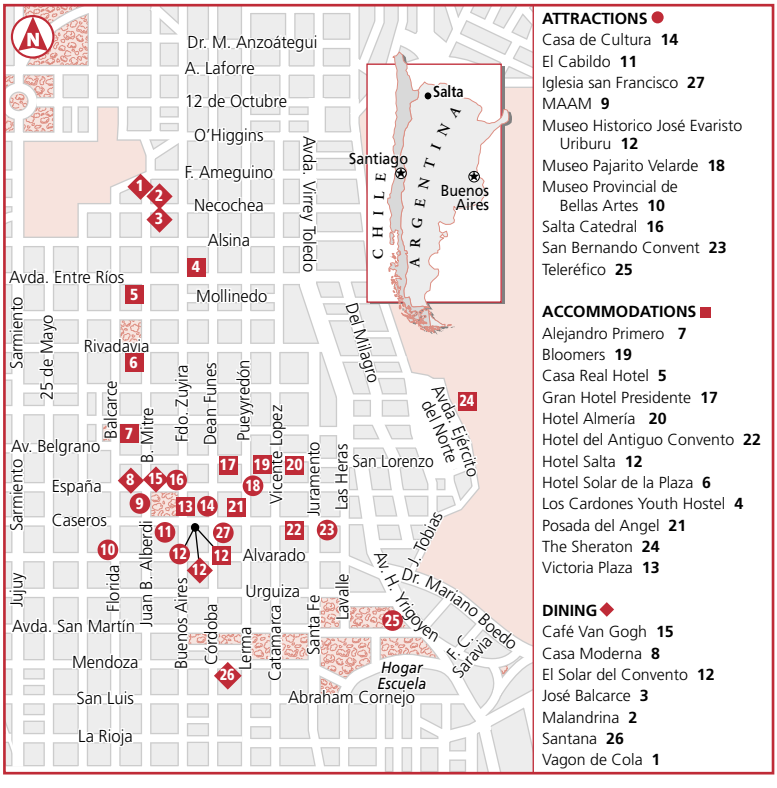
Salta Cathedral The corny-yellow facade of this cathedral dominates the central plaza. Inside you'll find beautiful interiors of ocher, blue, green, and gold with angels and cherubs smiling from the ornate ceiling corners. It holds a pantheon of Salta's luminaries, including local freedom fighter and strongman Martín Miguel de Güemes. There is a lovely side gallery of arches and beautiful floor tiles and an elaborate pulpit is perched to one side like a tiny gilded balcony.

España 558. No phone. Mon–Fri 6:30am–12:15pm and 4:30–8:15pm; Sat 7:30am–12:15pm and 5–8:15pm; Sun 7:30am–1pm and 5–9:15pm.

San Bernardo Convent ★★ Salta's oldest religious building was declared a Historical National Monument in 1941. It's worthy of a walk by to admire the city's most impressive example of colonial and indigenous art (only Carmelite nuns are allowed to enter). Indigenous craftsmen carved the entrance from a carob tree in 1762.

Caseros near Santa Fe.

Teleférico (Salta Cable Car) ★ Kids This Swiss-made, well-maintained cable car has been in operation since 1987, ferrying tourists to the top of San Bernardo Hill, 300m (984 ft.) over Salta. It is a pleasant ride up, though the frosted Perspex glass inhibits the



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Santana **26**
Vagon de Cola **1**

view somewhat. At the top there is a set of gardens, artificial waterfalls, and a panoramic view of the Lerma v alley. You can grab a snack at the casual r estaurant. If you miss the last tram at 7:30pm, a cheap taxi will r eturn you to the city center.

At the int ersection of a vs. H. Yrigoyen and San M artín. ✆ **387/431-0641**. t elerificosalta@salta.gov.ar. Admission $4 (£2.70) adults, $3 (£1.65) children. Daily 10am–7:30pm.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES & TOUR OPERATORS

The bounty of nature around Salta is staggering. Most of the landscape is untouched, and there are plenty of gorges and canyons and volcanic peaks to negotiate. The city is a good base to go farther and explore the eerie salt plains, known as Salinas, and the multicolored mountain ranges of H umahuaca, in J ujuy pr ovince to the nor th. **Volcan H igueras,** Mendoza 453, S alta (✆ **387/431-9175;** www.volcanhigueras.com.ar), and **Silvia Magno,** San J uan 2399 (✆ **387/434-1468;** silviamagnovyt@aol.com), conduct 1-day excursions to both places. **Agencia del P eregrino,** Alvarado 351 (✆ **387/422-9440;** www.agenciadelperegrino.com.ar), specializes in tours of the beautiful hilltop villages of Cachi and Purmamarca.

BIRD-WATCHING Eco-tourism is gaining popularity in the area due to the abundance of wildlife. One- to 4-day safaris and bird-watching expeditions are organized by **Clark Expediciones,** Caseros 121, Salta (✆ **387/421-5390;** www.clarkexpediciones.com), an excellent local outfitter. Their bird-watching trips run from half a day to 2 days, and the highlight is usually seeing the immense Andean condor soaring over the mountains.

HORSEBACK RIDING **Finca Lesser** (✆ **387/155-827-332** [cell]; www.redsalta.com/fincalesser) is a private nature reserve 15km (9 1/3 miles) from the city center. Here you can do half-day or full-day horseback riding along river valleys and lush hills. **Los Amigos,** Quebrado de San Lorenzo (✆ **387/492-7033**), organizes horseback riding in the hills of San Lorenzo overlooking the city. **Sayta** (✆ **387/156-836-565** [cell]; www.sayta.com.ar) organizes 1-day excursions to a ranch 40km (25 miles) south of the city, costing $70 (£47), including lunch and transfer.

MOUNTAIN BIKING **Salta Rafting,** Buenos Aires 88, Local 14 (✆ **387/401-0301;** www.saltarafting.com), takes you in 4WD to a mountaintop 3,600m (9,843 ft.) high, where you start an exhilarating 45km (28-mile) descent. **MTB Salta,** Gral. Güemes 569 (✆ **387/422-8317;** www.mtbsalta.com), also organizes mountain bike excursions as well as canoe trips on Campo Alegre dam.

PARAGLIDING **Amazing Mountains,** Juramento 466, Salta (✆ **387/422-3179**), has trips to jump off San Lorenzo hill and do kite buggying on Salinas salt plains for $33 (£22) and $86 (£58) a day, respectively.

TREKKING **Adventure Life Journeys,** 1655 S. 3rd St. W., Missoula, MT 59801 (✆ **800/344-6118** or 4065/412677; www.adventure-life.com), offers some of the best-organized treks in the region, usually beginning and ending in Buenos Aires. Their popular 9-day Northwest trek through Salta, Cafayate, and Cachi runs about $1,695 (£1,149) per person, everything included. **Mandes Travel Europe,** Leguizamón 1308, Salta (✆ **387/422-7873;** www.andesmoto.com), organizes 1-day trekking and motorbike excursions from Salta. **Turismo San Lorenzo,** J.C. Dávalos 960, San Lorenzo (✆ **387/492-1757;** www.turismosanlorenzo.com), organizes treks through San Lorenzo, starting at $60 (£41) per day.

WATERSPORTS Rafting and windsurfing are popular in the Dique Cabra Corral, 70km (43 miles) south of Salta. For more information, contact **Salta Rafting,** Buenos Aires 88, Local 14 (✆ **387/401-0301;** www.saltarafting.com), and **Active Argentina,** Zuviria 982, Salta (✆ **387/431-1868**).

SPAS & WELLNESS CENTERS

All the better hotels have spa facilities. **Touch Relax Urbano,** Lerma 289, Salta (✆ **387/431-7032**), and **Spa Urbano,** Caseros 121, Depto. 1 (✆ **387/154-537-231** [cell]), are two city clinics offering massages and skin care treatments. **Masaje Terapéutico,** at Dean Funes and Gral. Güemes (✆ **387/425-3775**), is a small massage center that will also visit your hotel. **Don Numas Spa,** Pompilio Guzman 1470 (✆ **387/492-1296;** www.spadonnumas.com.ar), is a small lodge in San Lorenzo with a relaxing spa that is open to day visitors.

SHOPPING

Salta province's secretary of tourism does a great job controlling their handmade products—from textiles to bamboo and wood ornaments. After certification, they're sold only at the **Mercado Artesanal** ★★, San Martín 2555 (✆ **387/434-2808**), open from 9am

to 9pm daily. Here in a beautifully restored millhouse 23 blocks from the central plaza, you'll find authentic products—from leather goods to candles—made throughout Salta Province by local artisans. The price is controlled, too, so you don't have to worry about bargaining here. You'll also find beautiful jewelry and silver, and you can pause for some sustenance in the coffeehouse with Wi-Fi.

Strangely enough, across the road is a tacky market that draws a larger crowd, partly because the bus tour companies get a commission. Here, like many places in the city, you'll find factory-produced gaucho memorabilia and wall hangings.

Casa de Antigüedades, Caseros 332 (✆ **387/421-1911**), is a rambling antiques store jammed with everything from period furniture and local art. It's open Monday to Saturday 9am to 1:30pm and 4 to 9:30pm; ring the bell and one of the owners from the Perez family will happily look after you. **La Casa del Arte,** Buenos Aires 25 (✆ **387/431-0050**), is a small store crammed with some beautiful art and jewelry, as is **Puestos del Marqués,** Buenos Aires 68 (✆ **387/422-0899**). **Amankay,** Pueblo Chico, Balcarce 999 (✆ **387/431-0335**), and **Inyás Artisanías,** España 375 (✆ **387/436-0260;** www.artesaniasinyas.com.ar), both specialize in original handicrafts and precious stones. For alpaca goods and silverware, try **Ambay,** Caseros 376 (✆ **387/431-7182**), and **Suyay,** Caseros 525 (✆ **387/431-5961**). For all things leather, go to **Torcivia,** Buenos Aires 28 (✆ **387/422-7097**), or **Decuero,** Mitre 291 (✆ **387/422-4166**).

Salta does a nice line in regional food products, usually of the sweet variety. Alfajores and Turron Salteños are famous biscuits from the region. You can find both at the family-owned confectionery **La Tía Yola,** Belgrano 461 (✆ **387/401-1007;** www.tiayola.com.ar), as well as homemade fruit preserve. For some of Salta's famous wine, check out **Vinos de Salta,** Caseros 332 (✆ **387/154-146-063** [cell]), or **Bella Hortencia,** Balcarce 980 (✆ **387/422-7474**). The former conducts tastings and has a selection of the regions best cigars. ***Note:*** Most stores close for siesta from 1 to 5pm.

Salta's main shopping mall is known as **Alto Noa,** Av. Virrey Toledo 702 (✆ **387/431-1000**), and is good for some air-conditioned siesta-time shopping. It is located 12 blocks from the central plaza.

WHERE TO STAY

Salta has a wealth of accommodations, and prices are still reasonable in comparison with other parts of the country. Options are good both inside and outside the city center. Staying in the city center gives you a chance to walk everywhere. If you're after some peace and quiet, though, consider staying in the nearby village of San Lorenzo.

City Center

Very Expensive

Alejandro Primero ★★★ (Value) Salta's second five-star hotel beats the Sheraton for color and charm. Two gauchos greet you as you enter an 11-story glass vaulted building of Andean chic. Carpets are adorned with miniature designs of *guanacos* (llamas), ostriches, and cacti. Corridors are enlivened with leather wall hangings, indigenous art, and the occasional ceramic pot. Rooms are spacious with panoramic views, and double-glazing ensures the noisy downtown location does not intrude on your *tranquilidad.* The indigenous theme creeps into the room furnishings, with geometric patterns flourishing on armrests, headboards, and curtains. Named after the local owner's son who died in a car crash, Alejandro Primero offers all the luxury of a top hotel without losing a sense of place and a human touch.

Balcarce 252. ✆ **387/400-0000.** www.alejandro1hotel.com.ar. 167 units. $112 (£76) double; from $225 (£152) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; lounge; indoor pool; exercise room; sauna; business center w/free high-speed Internet; meeting rooms; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Hotel Solar de la Plaza ★★★ (Finds) This absolutely charming hotel used to be the residence of one of Salta's well-known families, Patron Costas. The four rooms in the older part of the building were the actual bedrooms of the family members. They have been meticulously transformed into comfortable hotel rooms while retaining their old-world feel—hardwood floors, Jacuzzi tubs, and wrought-iron floor lamps (handmade in Salta). The rooms in the newer wing sport the same decor but with a slightly more modern feel, including marble pedestal sinks in the bathrooms and writing desks made from local wood. Service is gracious and refined, and the public areas are incredibly elegant, from the rooftop pool with its adjoining sun deck to the attractive restaurant serving regional specialties with a nouvelle twist. The English-speaking staff can arrange many outdoor activities, including hiking, horseback riding, and bird-watching at the nearby Patron Costas ranch.

Juan M. Leguizamon 669. ✆/fax **387/431-5111.** www.solardelaplaza.com.ar. 30 units. $210–$220 (£142–£149) double; $230 (£156) suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; lounge; small outdoor pool; exercise room; sauna; business center; limited room service; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, safe.

The Sheraton Salta's first five-star hotel lacks imagination but trumps on location. The design could be described as very Sheraton-esque—bland but luxurious. A plain, cream-colored facade hangs over a dark lobby of stone walls, corduroy seating, and cobbled stones. Bright, terra-cotta hallways lead to an anticlimax, as the spacious rooms are somewhat colorless and sterile. Nevertheless, they have all the creature comforts expected of a Sheraton. What really stands out here is the view. The hotel is a U-shaped, seven-story building cut into the side of a hill overlooking the city (a 10-min. walk from the center). Every room offers a vista of the Andean *precordillera,* and the city's rooftop hodgepodge of terra-cotta tiles, church spires, and bell towers. Guests can admire all this from a large outdoor pool area with wooden decking and a generous-size Jacuzzi.

Av. Ejercito del Norte 330. ✆ **387/432-3000.** www.starwoodhotels.com. 145 units. $145 (£98) double; from $265 (£179) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; lounge; casino; outdoor pool; exercise room; sauna; Jacuzzi; business center; meeting rooms; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Expensive

Casa Real Hotel & Spa ★★ (Value) Rooms at the Casa Real are very spacious and comfortable, with big picture windows (some overlooking the mountains), large-screen TVs, and firm, comfortable beds. Bathrooms are also large and very clean. The hotel boasts a decent-size exercise room and a good-size indoor pool, as well as an attractive restaurant and bar. The staff is friendly and can help arrange transportation and tours.

Mitre 669. ✆ **387/421-5675.** www.casarealsalta.com.ar. 80 units. $110 (bp]74) double; from $130 (£88) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; lounge; indoor pool; exercise room; sauna; business center w/free high-speed Internet; meeting rooms; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Gran Hotel Presidente ★ This contemporary hotel has attractive guest rooms splashed in rose and apple green, with sparkling white-tile bathrooms. The chic lobby features black-and-white marble with Art Deco furniture and leopard-skin upholstery. The pleasant international restaurant is located on the upstairs mezzanine, and there's a spa with a heated indoor pool, a sauna, a fitness room, and a solarium.

Av. de Belgrano 353. ✆/fax **387/431-2022.** www.granhotelpresidente.com. 96 units. $100 (£68) double; $125 (£85) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; small indoor pool; exercise room; sauna; meeting rooms; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Moderate

Bloomers Small and quirky, Bloomers is a unique and charming place to stay in the city center. This is not a bed-and-breakfast but a "bed and brunch," indicating the somewhat colorful, bohemian aspect of this boutique hotel. Wacky rugs and arty lamps adorn the five rooms, along with huge ceramic urns and luminous, cube-shaped beanbag-type chairs. One room has a regal flavor, with pink walls, an elegantly hung mosquito net, and silk cushions. The bathrooms are a decent size, with colorful, mosaic-style tiling. Some rooms are bigger than others (ask for one out front), and only two have air-conditioning. Public spaces include a small garden and barbecue terrace but no pool.

Vicente Lopez 129. ✆/fax **387/422-7449.** www.bloomers-salta.com.ar. 5 units. From $60 (£41) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Kitchen; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Hotel Almería ★ This new hotel has an old-fashioned efficiency about it. The deceptively mediocre white facade, complete with flagpoles, leads to a spacious marble lobby with a gold-trimmed elevator. Plush, upholstered hallways lead to modern, well-fitted rooms that have dark-wood furniture and custom-made headboards with inset light switches. The spot-lighting and chrome fittings in the all-white bathrooms add to its modern, comfortable feel. Included in the price is use of the marvelous solarium upstairs, with a giant Jacuzzi and splendid view of the city.

Vicente Lopez 146 ✆ **387/431-4848.** www.hotelalmeria.com.ar. 64 units. From $95 (£64) double; from $165 (£112) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; room service; laundry service; solarium. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Hotel Salta ★ **Moments** Popular with Europeans, this neoclassical hotel sits in the heart of Salta—facing Plaza 9 de Julio—and makes an excellent base from which to explore the city. Opened in 1890, these are hardly the most modern accommodations you'll find, but the hotel's wood balconies and arabesque carvings, peaceful courtyard, refreshing pool, and beautiful dining room overlooking the plaza considerably heighten its appeal. At $10 (£5.50) more, "A" rooms are larger than standard rooms and have bathtubs, as opposed to just showers. The friendly staff will arrange horseback riding, golf, and other outdoor activities upon request.

Buenos Aires 1. ✆/fax **387/431-0740.** www.hotelsalta.com. 99 units. From $95 (£64) double; from $160 (£108) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool; sauna; small business center; meeting rooms; room service; massage; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, safe.

Posada del Angel This is a tidy little boutique hotel located in the heart of the city. It has a homey, villa feel with parquet floors and small courtyard. The brass beds are a little on the small side and the curtains a little loud, but, in general, rooms have a very cool ambience. An inviting library is one of its most distinctive charms. Come here if you're laid-back and bookish.

Pueyreddon 25. ✆ **387/431-8223.** www.hotelposadadelangel.com.ar. 7 units. From $75 (£51) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Courtyard; library; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Hotel del Antiguo Convento ★★ (Finds) The humble colonial entrance to this budget hotel might make you think it is a little too budget. But you will be pleasantly surprised as the modern reception area opens out into three courtyards and a garden pool, all decorated with flowers, pots, and flagstones. The surrounding rooms are mid-size, with air-conditioning and TV. The bathrooms are small but sparkling clean and perfectly adequate. Out back is a spacious suite that accommodates three people and is conveniently located in front of the pool. The extremely helpful staff and central location make it the best choice for quality accommodations in the city.

Caseros 113. ✆/fax **387/422-7267.** www.hoteldelconvento.com.ar. 25 units. From $60 (£41) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $5 (£3.40). **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; laundry service. Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Los Cardones Youth Hostel Youth is the correct term here when describing one of Salta's better hostels. If you want to meet people and be close to the nightlife action on Balcarce, this pleasant town house is not a bad choice. An attractive common room with comfy sofas leads to clean, simple rooms with bright blue walls and simple beds. The dorms are light and airy with plenty of space, and beds and bunks to choose from.

Entre Rios 454. ✆ **387/431-4026.** www.loscardones.todowebsalta.com.ar. 12 units. From $22 (£15) double with shared bathrooms; dorm bed $9 (£6.10) per person. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. No parking. **Amenities:** Bar; communal TV/DVD player w/DVD library; high-speed Internet.

Victoria Plaza If you're in Salta to sightsee rather than to loll around in sumptuous hotel rooms, then the Victoria Plaza should do just fine. Rooms are stark and simple, but they're clean, comfortable, and cheerfully maintained. Those on the seventh floor and higher enjoy better views for a few dollars more. The hotel has an excellent location next to the main plaza, the Cabildo (town hall), and the cathedral. The cafeteria-like restaurant is open 24 hours, and the hotel offers free airport transfers.

Zuviría 16. ✆/fax **387/431-8500.** www.hotelvictoriaplaza.com.ar. 96 units. From $75 (£51) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Tiny exercise room; sauna; meeting room; laundry service; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge.

Outside the City Center

Very Expensive

House of Jasmines ★★★ (Moments) This pristine farmhouse on 120 hectares (296 acres) was converted into a fantastic inn worthy of a spread in *House & Garden.* There is a beautiful fireplace in the main living room as you enter the house. Each of the seven rooms is different, but all are exquisitely decorated in keeping with the colonial feel of the house—four-poster beds, antique furniture, and fluffy duvets. Fresh roses (and jasmines in season) will fill your room with a glorious scent. Bathrooms are sparkling and new. Most guests opt to dine in the elegant dining room, and the chef prepares everything from scratch—even the bread is baked on the premises. Miles of trails and open fields surround a magnificent swimming pool and a rose garden. You are a guest here, not a customer, and the staff will do everything to help make you feel at home. The farmhouse is close to Salta's airport, about a 15-minute drive from the city center.

Camino al Encon, La Merced Chica. ✆/fax **387/497-2002.** www.houseofjasmines.com. 7 units. $215–$365 (£145–£247). Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; pristine outdoor pool; room service; laundry service.

Moderate

El Castillo de San Lorenzo ★ One of Salta's most distinctive hotels is a Tuscan-style pile dug into the side of a leafy hill just 10 minutes' ride from the city. Italian immigrant Luigi Bartoletti built it in the late 1800s as a summer home in the style of an Italian *castello.* Tall palm trees shade the imposing mansion housing a boutique hotel and slightly ramshackle restaurant that produces excellent food. The rooms are different but all are comfortable and furnished with antiques. Room no. 3 has a Jacuzzi tub and large windows with views of the lush grounds. The two-story suite comes with a fireplace and a giant candelabrum. The restaurant serves excellent regional specialties. There are countless outdoor activities in the area, and the friendly English-speaking staff will be happy to make arrangements for you.

Camino a la Quebrada, Villa San Lorenzo. ✆/fax **387/492-1052.** www.hotelelcastillo.com.ar. 8 units. $85–$106 (£58–£72) double; $132 (£89) suite. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; beautiful outdoor pool; room service. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

The Northwest has its own cuisine influenced by indigenous cooking. *Locro* (a corn-and-bean soup), *humitas* (a sort of corn-and-goat cheese soufflé), tamales (meat and potatoes in a ground corn shell), empanadas (a turnover filled with potatoes, meat, and vegetables), *lechón* (suckling pig), and *cabrito* (goat) occupy most menus. Traditional Argentine steaks and pasta dishes are usually available, too. In addition to the locations listed below, the **Mercado Central,** at Florida and San Martín, has a number of inexpensive eateries serving regional food.

Moderate

Café van Gogh CAFE "Our mission is to make everyone feel at home, no matter where they're from," says one staff member, who proudly displays a collection of coffee cups from Argentina, Europe, and North America. This cheeky cafe, surrounded by little white lights on the outside and decorated with van Gogh prints inside, serves pizzas, sandwiches, meats, hot dogs, and empanadas. Come evening, the cafe-turned-bar becomes the center of Salta nightlife, with live bands playing Wednesday through Saturday after midnight. Café van Gogh is also a popular spot for breakfast.

España 502. ✆ **387/431-4659.** Main courses $8–$10 (£5.40–£6.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7am–2am.

Casa Moderna ★ DELICATESSEN/WINE BAR Casa Moderna is located 2 blocks from the central plaza, and has a warm, genuine, old-world feel. You can dine in a lovely small courtyard or the adjacent black-framed sun house. Indoors, ham hangs from the ceiling over shelves crammed with wine, chocolates, cheese, and whiskey, while giant coolers sit behind a long old-fashioned counter that stretches back to a dark salon. The menu includes platters of empanadas and homemade pasta, along with wine and beer, cheese platters, and fondue and fruit salads, the most delicious of which is the roasted pear. The owners have opened a second branch several blocks away at Vte. Lopez 423.

España 674. ✆ **387/422-0066.** Main courses $8–$12 (£5.40–£8.20). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 8:30am–2pm and 6–10:30pm.

El Solar del Convento ★★ ARGENTINE Ask locals to point you to Salta's best "typical" restaurant—the word used to describe places serving traditional Argentine fare—and they won't hesitate with their answer. This former Jesuit convent has long been an outstanding *parrilla* (grill), serving quality steaks (the mixed grill for two is a deal at

$4) and regional specialties such as empanadas, tamales, and *humitas*. The 10-page menu also includes beef brochettes, grilled salmon, chicken with mushrooms, and large, fresh salads. Two dining rooms are connected by an A-frame thatched roof, and a medieval-style chandelier hangs from the ceiling. The atmosphere is festive, and, even late on a Sunday night, expect the restaurant to be packed.

Caseros 444. ✆ **387/439-3666.** Main courses $8–$15 (£5.40–£10). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 8pm–midnight.

José Balcarce ★★★ (Finds) INTERNATIONAL/REGIONAL José Balcarce is one of the most talked-about dining establishments in northwestern Argentina. Everything here is done right, to make you feel as though you've come to a very special place—from the exposed stone walls to the exquisite lighting and elegant dark-wood tables, to the very efficient service. Andean cuisine with a modern flair is the specialty Here's where you can try roasted llama meat served with Andean potatoes or quinoa, or llama medallions with prickly pear sauce. Local goat cheese is drizzled over a "tower" of grilled aubergines and olive tapenade. You can even have llama carpaccio if you're feeling adventurous, although simpler dishes are always available, such as fresh trout roasted with butter and ginger, or chicken curry with vegetables. The menu changes often and other world cuisines are occasionally featured. Order a well-chilled Torrontes white wine to round out your meal.

Necochea 590. ✆ **387/421-1628.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $8–$12 (£5.40–£8.20). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 9pm–midnight; Fri–Sat 9pm–1am.

Malandrino REGIONAL This bright artery restaurant is a nice fusion of old and new, traditional and modern, much like the food. Here you can enjoy llama meat stirred in a wok while musing on bright oil paintings above cow-skin seats. The Andean cereal quinoa is in plentiful supply, as is giant milanesa meat portions that hang over your plate. The formal waist-coated waiters seem in contrast to the paper napkins, but they are very efficient and helpful. The wine list is decent with the great value Quara Syrah highly recommended. Malandrino is located close to all the nighttime action on Balcarce Street.

Balcarce 892. ✆ **387/154-767653** (cell). Main courses $5–$8 (£3.40–£5.40). No credit cards. Thurs–Sun noon–1am; Tues–Wed 7pm–1am.

Santana ★ INTERNATIONAL This is one of the few international restaurants in Salta with a classic rather than rustic style. The enticing menu features chicken with white-wine cream sauce, lobster with *chimichurri* sauce, and homemade ravioli with various cheeses.

Mendoza 208. ✆ **387/432-0941.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $6–$8 (£4.05–£5.40). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3:30pm and 8pm–midnight.

Vagon de Cola REGIONAL One of the first things that strikes you about eating out in Salta is how gracious and efficient the waitstaff are compared to the rest of the country. Here, the middle-age waiter came not only with a menu but a city map as well. This modern restaurant is a little too bright and could be described as nouveau colonial. The open kitchen is a nice touch, however, as is the spectacular salad bar. The menu includes excellent kid goat and trout.

Balcarce and Ameghino. ✆ **387/431-9588.** Main courses $10–$12 (£6.80–£8.20). No credit cards. Thurs–Sun noon–1am; Tues–Wed 7pm–1am.

Inexpensive

Viejo Jack II (Kids) (Value) ARGENTINE An inexpensive local *parrilla* frequented by locals, Viejo Jack II (Viejo Jack I is at Av. Virrey Toledo 145) serves succulent steaks and fresh pastas. Kids have access to a play area as well.

Av. Reyes Católicos 1465. ✆ **387/439-2802.** Main courses $4–$6 (£2.70–£4.05). DC, MC, V. Daily 12:30–3:30pm and 8pm–1am.

SALTA AFTER DARK

BARS & NIGHTCLUBS Night owls will find plenty to occupy themselves, whether it's around the late-night eateries close to the plaza or the pleasant stretch of bars, restaurants, and nightclubs along the nighttime parade known as Calle Balcarce, close to the train station. **Goblin Irish Pub,** Caseros 445 (✆ **387/401-0886**), is a handsome bar that draws an expat crowd eager to speak English. Drinks are pricey, however, compared to other places. **Wasabi,** Balcarce 938 (✆ **387/421-6575**), is a trendy sushi bar and disco, open Tuesday to Sunday 9pm to 2am. **Uno,** Balcarce 926 (✆ **387/422-9120**), is a slick establishment that attracts a young crowd. **Club Nueve,** Balcarce 907 (✆ **387/155-323-009** [cell]), is a nightclub specializing in electronic music.

CASINOS Every town and village in Argentina has at least one casino, and Salta is no different. The most upscale is the Sheraton's **Casino Salta,** Ejercito del Norte 330 (✆ **387/437-3022;** www.casinosalta.com). **Boulevard Casino,** Av. Virrey Toledo 702 (no phone), is located in Alto Noa shopping mall and is open 24 hours.

CINEMAS **Hoyts,** Alto Noa Shopping Mall, Av. Virrey Toledo 702 (✆ **387/421-9666**), offers standard Hollywood fare at its eight-screen theater.

PEÑAS A trip to Salta would not be complete without a night spent tapping along to a singing gaucho dressed up in billowing pants and knee-high leather boots. Traditional music bars (known as *peñas*) are dotted all around the city, but are particularly numerous on Balcarce Street. **Café de Tiempo** ★, Balcarce 901 (✆ **387/432-0771**), is one of the most famous, with a colorful, old-world interior. **La Vieja Estacion,** Balcarce 885 (✆ **387/421-7727**), and **La Peña del Chaqueno,** Balcarce 885 (✆ **387/421-7727**), are both big and popular—with handkerchief-waving maidens dancing until late—and serve traditional food. **Peña Gauchos de Güemes,** Av. Uruguay 750 (✆ **387/421-7007;** www.gauchosdesalta.com.ar), takes it a little more seriously, and the adobe-style venue has been declared a Salta heritage site. It is located 13 blocks from the plaza, close to Alto Noa shopping mall.

2 A DRIVING TOUR OF THE CALCHAQUIES VALLEY

With green rolling hills, lush jungle, and multicolored rock, the landscape surrounding Salta has it all. Tobacco, tropical fruits, and sugar cane are the main agricultural products here, and you will see tobacco "ovens" off the side of the road. Heading south from Salta on RN 68 for 38km (24 miles), you'll reach **El Carril,** a typical small town of the valley, with a central plaza and botanical garden displaying 70% of the region's flora.

Although you can reach **Cafayate** more quickly by continuing south on RN 68, it is far more interesting to go west on Ruta 33 for a longer, more rugged circuit that will require you to stop overnight. Travel 2.7km (1 3/4 miles) after El Carril to **Cabaña de**

Cabras, in La Flor del Pago (✆ **387/499-1093**), one of the principal goat farms and cheese factories in Argentina. Ducks, geese, and hundreds of goats roam the scenic property, and you can sample the delicious chivo in the small dining room and cheese shop in the proprietors' home. A bread and jam snack costs only $3 (£2); a cheese sandwich is $5 (£3.40); and a glass of local wine is $3 (£2). (The kind owners will prepare a multicourse lunch or dinner with advance reservations.) You can also stay over in one of their well-appointed rooms for $60 (£41).

Dense vegetation covers the region surrounding El Carril, but the land quickly dries out as you climb RP 33 toward **Piedra del Molino (Mill Rock).** The road narrows from pavement to dirt 10km (6¼ miles) west of El Carril—watch closely for oncoming cars. A small shrine to Saint Raphael (a patron saint of travelers) indicates your arrival at Mill Rock (3,620m/11,874 ft. elevation) and the entrance to **Parque Nacional los Cardones,** a semiarid landscape filled with cacti, sage, and limestone rock formations.

Ten kilometers (6¼ miles) before Cachi lies **Payogasta,** an ancient Indian town on the path of the Inca Road that once connected an empire stretching from Peru to northern Argentina. **Cachi** (see below) is another precolonial village worth a visit for its Indian ruins. From Cachi, take RN 40 south past Brealito to Molinos, a 17th-century town of adobe homes and dusty streets virtually unchanged from how it must have appeared 350 years ago. Here you will find the increasingly famous winery and wine lodge **Colomé** (see "Colomé—Cactus & Vineyards," later in this chapter). Continuing south, consider stopping 9km (5½ miles) before Angastaco at the **Estancia Carmen** (✆ **387/1568-01322** [cell]), which boasts spectacular views of the Calchaquíes Valley and its long mountain canyon. Between 9am and 6pm, you can visit the ranch's Inca ruins, rent horses, and peek inside the private church in back, where two 300-year-old mummies rest in peace.

Continue south on RN 40 to **Angastaco,** which may be a good place to spend the night. **Hostería Angastaco,** Avenida Libertad (✆ **3868/497-700**), 1km (about ½ mile) west of the village, is popular with European travelers. The simple hotel offers live folkloric music each evening. The staff will help arrange regional excursions and horseback riding. From Angastaco to San Carlos, you will pass the **Quebrada de las Flechas (Arrows Ravine),** with its stunning rock formations, which appeared in *The Empire Strikes Back.* People often stop their cars by the side of the road and climb a bit. Jesuits settled in **San Carlos,** and the church is a national historic monument. **Cafayate** (see below) marks the southern end of this circuit.

Return to Salta along RN 68 heading north, which takes you through the **Río Calchaquíes Valley** and on to the **Quebrada del Río de las Conchas (Canyon of the River of Shells).** The most interesting crimson rock formations are the Garganta del Diablo (Devil's Throat), El Anfiteatro (the Ampitheater), and Los Castillos (the Castles), which are all indicated by road signs. Salta is 194km (120 miles) from Cafayate, along RN 68, and it shouldn't take more than a few hours to drive.

CACHI ★

Home of the Chicoanas Indians before the Spaniards arrived, Cachi is a tiny pueblo of about 5,000 people, interesting for its Indian ruins, colonial church, and archaeological museum. The Spanish colonial **church,** built in the 17th century and located next to the main plaza, has a floor and ceiling made from cactus wood. The **archaeological museum** is the most impressive museum of its kind in the Northwest, capturing the influence of the Incas and Spaniards on the region's indigenous people. Next to the main plaza, its courtyard is filled with Inca stone engravings and pre-Columbian artifacts. Wall rugs, ponchos, and ceramics are sold at the **Centro Artesanal,** next to the tourist office, on the

main plaza (the people of Cachi are well respected for their weaving skills, and the ponchos they sell are beautiful). **La Paya,** 10km (6¼ miles) south of Cachi, and **Potrero de Payogasta,** 10km (6¼ miles) north of Cachi, hold the area's most important archaeological sites.

GETTING THERE Cachi is 157km (97 miles) west of Salta on RP 33. **Empresa Marcos Rueda** (✆ **387/421-4447**) offers two buses daily from Salta; the trip takes 4 hours and costs $6 (£4.05).

VISITOR INFORMATION You can pick up maps, excursion information, and tips on restaurants and hotels at the **Oficina de Turismo,** Avenida General Güemes (✆ **3868/491902**), open Monday through Friday from 8am to 9pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am to 3pm and 5 to 9pm.

Where to Stay

Casa de Campo La Paya ★ Opened in 2000 on a 19th-century *estancia* (ranch), this rustic inn overlooking the Calchaquíes Valley is a quiet place to walk, read, and relax. Guest rooms have adobe walls and wood-beam ceilings, llama-wool rugs, and mattresses laid on stone frames. You can eat your meals here if you like; all the produce (except the meat) comes from this farm. The owners will also arrange excursions to the nearby mountains, valley, and river.

8km (5 miles) from Cachi, on RN 40 to Molinos. ✆/fax **3868/491139.** www.casadecampolapaya.com.ar. 8 units. From $60 (£41) double. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Restaurant; pool; outdoor excursions.

La Merced del Alto ★★ Austerity and luxury don't often make good bedfellows, but at La Merecd del Alto they seem to get on just fine. This whitewashed Spanish-style hacienda sits in a fertile valley 1.6km (1 mile) outside Cachi. A domed tower crowns cloistered hallways that lead to ample rooms laid out in the most stylish Andean chic decor. Wrought-iron headboards frame cow-skin pillow cases beneath silver lamps. The varnished floors match the curved bamboo ceilings in what is a tasteful combination of traditional and modern. A spacious gallery invites you to lounge as do the deck chairs beside a gorgeous pool. A treat for those who like to treat themselves, yet beware it is in an isolated spot at the end of a pebbled track, and there is no TV.

Fuerte Alto, Cachi. ✆/fax **3868/490020.** www.lamerceddelalto.com. 15 units. From $165 (£112) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; pool; spa; outdoor excursions; free high-speed Internet.

Where to Dine

Confitería y Comedor del Sol REGIONAL When you walk into this village restaurant, locals are likely to cease their conversations and stare for a minute. Not to worry—they will quickly return to their business once you sit down; many are engaged in the afternoon's current soap opera. The menu is simple, consisting of pastas, *milanesas* (breaded meat cutlets), empanadas, and tamales. This is a great place to have lunch on your way to Molinos.

Ruiz de los Llanos. ✆. **3868/491222.** Main courses $3–$6 (£2–£4.05). No credit cards. Daily 8am–1am.

CAFAYATE ★★★

The wine town of Cafayate has its own distinct colors—pink dust, red hills, and olive-green mountains. Corn-yellow sand gathers along the curbstones of this sun-kissed village, while donkeys graze on the central plaza, and heaps of unlocked bicycles stand

outside schools and the coffee-colored cathedral. Add to this some pretty, palatial-style wineries, luxury lodges, excellent arts and crafts, and stunning vineyard country producing the aromatic white *torrontes* grape, and you can see why this whole area is becoming known as the Tuscany of Argentina.

GETTING THERE Cafayate lies 194km (120 miles) southwest of Salta, on RN 68. **Empresa El Indio** (✆ **387/432-0846**) offers three buses daily from Salta; the trip takes 3½ hours and costs about $10 (£6.80).

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** (✆ **3868/421470**) is located on the main plaza and provides maps, bus schedules, and lodging recommendations. Open hours are Monday through Saturday from 10am to 6pm.

Visiting the Wineries★

There are approximately 25 wineries to visit in the area, some palatial-style villas, others rustic boutique garages. All are within easy reach of the town and can be visited by bicycle or taxi. Some unexpectedly shut down their guided visits, for whatever reasons, so it is always wise to call ahead. The most popular time to visit is from February to early April, when the harvest occurs. Most wineries are open Monday to Saturday.

Bodegas Etchart, Finca La Rosa, 3km (1¾ miles) from Cafayate, on RN 40 (✆ **3868/421310**), is owned by the French wine giant Pernod-Ricard and is one of the region's most important, producing chardonnay, cabernet sauvignon, Tannat, Torrontes (a Muscatel-like white), and Malbec (a dry red). One-hour guided tours and wine tastings are offered Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday from 9am to noon. **Finca Las Nubes,** El Divisadero, Alto Valle de Cafayate, 5km (3 miles) from Cafayate (✆ **3868/422129**) is one of Argentina's smallest vineyards and is family-run, producing some young but excellent wines. The rustic facility is located a few kilometers up a dirt road from the center of town and provides lunches with reservations. Wine tours and tastings are free of charge Monday to Saturday 9am to 5pm; call for an appointment outside these hours or to arrange for a meal. **Michel Torino,** Finca La Rosa, 3km (1¾ miles) from Cafayate, on RN 40 (✆ **3868/155-66019** [cell]; www.michelto-rino.com.ar), is a beautiful, hacienda-style complex that also houses the luxury wine lodge Patios de Cafayate. The winery is also known as **Bodega El Esteco** and it produces the Don David Torrontes, one of the best examples of Argentina's signature white grape. They offer guided tours Monday to Friday from 10am to 6:30pm and Saturday 10am to noon. **Bodegas El Porvenir de los Andes★★**, Córdoba 32, Cafayate (✆ **3868/422007;** www.bodegaselporvenir.com), is one of my favorite wineries, producing rich concentrated reds. The winery is a handsome town house with courtyard, located 2 blocks from the plaza. While there, pip for the $10 (£6.80) tasting of Laborum, one of the best reds coming out of Salta. **San Pedro de Yacochuya ★**, RP 2, RN 40 (✆ **3868/421233;** www.sanpedrodeyacochuya.com.ar), is a boutique operation started by the Etchart family when they sold their larger winery. It is basically a tidy shed at the end of a dirt road lined by cactus 3km (2 miles) from the town; yet it is producing excellent Torrontes and Malbec from some of the highest vineyards in the world. Visits here are patchy in quality. If you are lucky to meet either Arnaldo or Marcos Etchart you will enjoy their bonhomie, made famous in the documentary *Mondovino.* You can even have lunch in the adjacent family home. Reservations are required, and opening hours can be erratic. **Bodega Nanni,** Silverio Chavarria 151 (✆ **3868/421527;** www.bodegananni.com), is a traditional winery that, in recent years, has concentrated on making purely organic wine. The

old-world industrial-style facility is located in to wn, 2 blocks fr om the plaza. **Bodega Domingo H ermanos,** Nuestra S eñora del R osario s/n, Cafayate (✆ **3868/421225;** www.domingohermanos.com), is a famous local pr oducer making decent table wines. I t is inter esting to visit to see the old-style way of making wine. Located .5km (1/3 mile) from the plaza, it is open every day 9am to 5pm and is popular with tour gr oups. **Vasija Secreta,** RN 40 (✆ **3868/421850**), is a large *bodega* that also houses a small but inter esting museum with winemaking equipment that dates back to 1857. I t is located on the outskirts of the to wn, a shor t walk fr om the plaza. I t is open M onday to S aturday 9am to 4pm.

Seeing the Sights

Most museums in this ar ea are free or r equest a small donation (usually no mor e than $1/70p). Even more interesting are the different workshops producing handicrafts from the area.

Arte en Telar This textile wor kshop offers a fascinating look into the local tradition of hand weaving. Guests can take a tour (usually in Spanish) and watch women work on hand looms in the gar den, converting alpaca and wool into scar ves and thr ows. At the front, there is a small display of all their pr oducts.

Colón 71. No phone. arteentelar@hotmail.com. Mon–Sat 10am–2pm and 4–10pm.

Museo de Vitivinicultura (Museum of Gr apevines and Wine) ★★ P art of the Bodega E ncantada winer y, this museum tells the stor y of grape gr owing and wine-making in and ar ound Cafayate. The 19th-centur y building houses old-fashioned machinery and mor e-modern equipment, as w ell as agricultural implements and documentary photographs.

RN 40, at Av. General Güemes. ✆ **3868/421125.** Mon–Fri 10am–1pm and 5–9pm.

Museo Regional y A rqueológico Rodolf o Br avo (Regional and A rchaeological Museum) ★ This small museum displays ceramics, textiles, and metal objects discovered over a 66-y ear period b y Rodolfo Bravo. Covering a period betw een the 4th and 15th centuries, these ar chaeological finds celebrate the heritage of D iaguita-Calchaquíes, and Inca tribes in the r egion.

Colón 191. ✆ **3868/421054.** Mon–Fri 11am–9pm; weekend hours vary.

Where to Stay

Cafayate has seen a surge in luxur y accommodations, mostly of the wine lodge v ariety. Many are within easy walking distance of the village.

Moderate

Killa Cafayate ★★ Value With a long, rambling cour tyard of white washed walls, terra-cotta tiles, wind chimes, and chunky wooden stair cases, H otel Killa has a bright Mediterranean feel. I ts four buildings contain spacious r ooms and small immaculate bathrooms with tubs and po werful sho wers. The 16 r ooms ar e decked out with local stone, windowed wardrobes, and indigenous ar t. Many have a rooftop view of the village. Little touches such as ceramic-face tiles in the walls, the occasional wicker chair in the courtyard, and white-flower creepers, make this one of the most delightful places to stop over while y ou're touring the ar ea. You will especially enjo y the lo vely pool and shaded courtyard out back. Owner M artha Chocobar is constantly on hand to help and offer advice on where to go. The hotel is 2 blocks fr om the main plaza.

Colón 47, 4427 Cafayate. ✆ **3868/422254.** www.killacafayate.com.ar. 16 units. $60 (£41) double; $120 (£81) apt for 4. Rates include continental breakfast. No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** Small lounge; pool; garden; patio.

Villa Vicuña A crazy mural of some local leprechauns stands in the shaded courtyard, surrounded by 12 simple but well-appointed rooms in a modern building with some colonial touches, such as an arched entrance and street balcony. The rooms are very comfortable, with wooden-posted beds, built-in wardrobes, and clean bathrooms of average size (10 have tubs). The decor is somewhat mixed, with plastic chairs in one corner of the courtyard and a traditional loom in the other, not to mention the leprechauns. Nevertheless, if you are looking for a clean, friendly place that's close to the plaza and not too expensive, this one will not disappoint.

Belgrano 76, 4427 Cafayate. ✆ **3868/422145.** www.villavicuna.com.ar. 12 units. $85 (£57) double; $120 (£81) suite. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; Wi-Fi. *In room:* TV.

Inexpensive

Hotel Gran Real Cafayate This terribly modest hotel has quiet rooms with very simple furnishings. These rooms, some with pleasant mountain views, are considerably more enticing than the gloomy downstairs lobby and cafe. Popular with Argentine visitors, the Gran Real has an attractive pool and barbecue area, which is its saving grace. Service is friendly. TVs are available, on request, for an additional $3 (£2) per night.

Av. General Güemes 128, 4427 Cafayate. ✆ **3868/421231.** Fax 3868/421016. www.granrealcafayate.com.ar. 35 units. $55 (£37) double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; nice outdoor pool. *In room:* TV (on request and for a fee).

Wine Lodges

Expensive

La Casa de la Bodega ★ The 20km (12-mile) drive to this luxury winery lodge is almost as enjoyable as the destination itself. You drive through a desert of pink sand and cactus sentinels until you reach a twisting road that meanders through purple mountains resembling melted Plasticine. The hotel itself is built of sand-colored brick, with lots of tile and wood; the reception desk is a huge trunk of the local tree *algarroba.* The eight rooms are large with stone headboards and yet more wood. Indigenous designs hang everywhere. The bathrooms are luxurious, with Jacuzzi and hydro-massage. All the rooms have mountain views, and four have balconies. Despite such opulence, there is no mistaking the humble, rural location, with small adobe huts in the distance and the occasional scampering goat and foraging boar to catch your attention. Adjoining the lodge is a small, ultramodern winery producing very decent wine.

RP 68 Km 18, Valle de Cafayate. ✆ **3868/421888.** www.lacasadelabodega.com.ar. 8 units. $120 (£81) double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; outdoor pool; spa; Wi-Fi. *In room:* TV, Jacuzzi.

Patios de Cafayate Hotel & Spa Overrated Patios de Cafayate does not quite get it right but it makes a valiant attempt. Through a series of leafy, flower-adorned courtyards (the patios in the name) you are transported through several eras. First stop: 18th-century colonial splendor. The main building is a palatial-style villa with fountains and even a tiny chapel for some private worship. Vaulted corridors lead to suitelike rooms with colonial portraits watching you from the corners. Hand-painted flowers creep over walls and tabletops and into very spacious rooms with Egyptian cotton sheets and generous bathrooms with sunken tubs. You'll feel like Gatsby himself in the high-ceilinged living

Colomé—Cactus & Vineyards

Bodega Colomé (Ruta Provincial 53, Molinos, Salta; ✆ **3868/494044;** www.bodegacolome.com) is the newest edition to Salta's ever-increasing list of winery lodges. Located 4 hours over bumpy, unpaved roads from either Cafayate or Salta, it fits in nicely with owner Donald Hess's penchant for building art-gallery wineries in far-flung, isolated places. The scenery is spectacular, with giant cactus giving three-fingered salutes amid vineyards and multicolored mountains. As you approach the winery, you pass the ancient village Molinos that has been virtually adopted by the winery, as Hess insists on employing the local population, and has built a new church and community center. Neat, stoned-lined roads lead to a low cream-colored, colonial-style building with a long gallery of arches. This is the upscale lodge and restaurant that caters to guests who want to get away from it all. In fact, the winery should only be visited if you wish to stay in the area, as it is a long, bumpy, dusty round-trip. There is a helicopter pad for high rollers and talk of a private landing strip for airplanes. The lodge rooms are large and luxurious, with indigenous touches such as the hand-woven rugs that the area is famous for. The restaurant produces some of the best cuisine in Argentina, which is no small achievement considering its remote location. In the past, the lodge has flown in some of the world's best chefs to oversee the kitchen, but they soon tire of the isolation and depart. A former sous-chef from the village now runs the operation, and there are no complaints.

room, with mellow jazz playing from a gramophone and tall windows overlooking the pool. Then jump ahead several centuries down a jasmine walkway, and you're in the futuristic wine spa—a slate-gray cube of modernist indulgence. Despite such splendor, it must be said the lodge's overall feeling is cold and corporate, and the staff are not very engaging. It has fabulous facilities but lacks a human touch.

RN 40, at RP 68 (part of El Esteco winery), 4427 Cafayate. ✆ **3868/421747.** www.luxurycollection.com/cafayate. 30 units. $200 (£135) double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** International restaurant; lounge; outdoor pool; spa. *In room:* TV.

Moderate

Viñas de Cafayate Wine Resort ★★ Situated 3km (2 miles) outside the town in the mountain foothills, this beautiful, simply designed wine lodge has a commanding view of the valley. The front facade of pillared arches leads to a large courtyard with a pond and a splash of purple from some lavender bushes. On either side are 12 rooms, big with minimal decor. They have traditional cane ceilings, king-size beds, terra-cotta tiles, and the occasional tapestry. The bathrooms are spacious and clean, and all have a shower and tub. Bordered by vineyards on every side, you can literally pick a grape and eat it while sunbathing by the pool. The restaurant is somewhat hall-like and bare, but it serves good traditional food, such as pork ribs with *choclo,* to guests and visitors alike.

25 de Mayo, Camino al Divisadero, Cafayate. ✆ **3868/422272.** www.cafayatewineresort.com. 12 units. $110 (£74) double. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; outdoor pool; Wi-Fi.

Where to Dine

El Rancho ARGENTINE This restaurant is the best one on the main plaza, and it 's less touristy than La Carr eta (below); when locals go out to eat, they come her e. The expansive dining room has an authentic bamboo roof, and the fans overhead keep things cool in the summer months. Start with freshly made empanadas, *humitas,* or tamales and a salad, and then mo ve on to o ven-baked *cabrito* (young goat) with r oasted potatoes. Pastas are made on the premises, served with a variety of meat dishes, including tenderloin, for diners after something simple. They stock decent house wines, ser ved in small jugs, and the short wine list features local vintages.

Vicario Toscano 4. ✆ **3868/421256.** Main courses $6–$9 (£4.05–£6.10). MC, V. Daily noon–3:30pm and 9pm–1am.

La Carreta de Don Olegario REGIONAL Popular with for eign visitors, this r estaurant has a pleasant dining room that lacks elegance, but the kitchen serves an authentic selection of regional dishes, including *cabritos.* Service is unhurried, so plan to enjo y a leisurely lunch or dinner if you come here. Folkloric shows take place in the ev enings.

Av. General Güemes 20. ✆ **3868/421004.** Main courses $5–$8 (£3.40–£5.40). MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 8–11pm.

Machacha ★★ ARGENTINE Cafayate's only gourmet r estaurant offers mor e than steak. The menu of this wine-themed establishment includes ex otic dishes such as llama meat and duck. Platters of smoked cheese and cold meats compete with rabbit for y our attention. The wine list is all local, with the very rustic Bodega Nanni for example, or the very alcoholic S an Pedro de Yacochuya. All this, along with a pebbled cour tyard and regional music, make it a v ery pleasant eating experience.

Güemes 28. ✆ **3868/422319.** Main c ourses $20–$30 (£14–£20). MC, V. Daily 10am–3pm and 7pm–2am.

3 HUMAHUACA, JUJUY

1,620km (1,004 miles) NW of Buenos Air es; 90km (56 miles) N of Salta

Quechuan women w earing color ful ponchos walk with babies strapped to their backs, while horses, cows, and goats graze on the surrounding vegetation. Look closely and you might spot a gaucho charging after his herd. Lush fields become increasingly dry and give way to striking r ock formations and rainbo w-colored mountain ranges so unusual they have been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. **Quebrada de Humahuaca** ★ is a 150km (93-mile) strip of land that brings you dangerously close to Bolivia, both in body and spirit. The fier y r ed ridges and copper-gr een plateaus hide timeless villages with genuine indigenous charm and pictur esque ar chitecture. The ar ea is a must-see, with 1-day excursions possible from Salta or the provincial capital San Salvador de Jujuy. Better still, stay in one of the many charming boutique lodges that ar e popping up in the area, particularly in Tilcara.

TILCARA ★★

Its narrow cobbled str eets and low colonial buildings hav e a dusty y ellow hue. If you're lucky enough to find y ourself alone, you may feel like y ou're on the set of an eerie spaghetti western just before the shootout. But chances are you will not be alone. Tilcara is gaining a reputation, becoming a thriving tourist to wn and the center of operations for

those who want to explore the area further. Visitors include artists inspired by the landscape and Carnaval lovers who enjoy a good party (see "Pachamama Parties," below).

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **Panamericano,** Dorrego, San Salvador de Jujuy (✆ **3884/237330**), is one of several local bus companies that travel from Jujuy's provincial capital to Tilcara. The journey takes 2 hours and costs $3 (£2). There are also regular buses that leave from **Salta Terminal de Omnibus,** at Avenida H. Yrigoyen and Abraham Cornejo, Salta (✆ **387/401-1143**). The journey takes 4 hours and costs $7 (£4.75). Travel agencies **Volcan Higueras,** Mendoza 453, Salta (✆ **387/431-9175;** www.volcanhigueras.com.ar), and **Silvia Magno,** San Juan 2399, Salta (✆ **387/434-1468;** silviamagnovyt@aol.com), offer 1-day excursions from Salta to Tilcara and beyond.

What to See & Do

Pucará is a reconstructed hilltop fort overlooking the town, first built 900 years ago by the Diaguita tribe. There is a pyramid-shaped monument at the summit and the entire site covers 8 hectares (20 acres), including a high-altitude botanical garden. The site is open daily from 9am to 12:30pm and 2 to 6pm. **Museo Arqueologico Eduardo Casanova,** Belgrano 445 (✆ **388/495-5006**), displays carved standing stones and other pre-Colombian artifacts. It is open every day 9am to 12:30pm and 2 to 6pm. **Museo Regional de Pintura Jose A. Terry,** Rivadavia 459 (✆ **388/495-5005**), displays works by the area's most famous painter. Open Tuesday to Sunday 9am to 7pm.

WHERE TO DINE

New restaurants are popping up every year, particularly along the principal street Belgrano. **Los Puestos,** at Padilla and Belgrano (✆ **388/495-5100**), is a busy tourist stop and deservedly so as it has warm ambience with rock walls and a bamboo roof patio. **Pachamama,** Belgrano 590 (✆ **388/495-5293**), is a bright red town house serving traditional fare with occasional live music.

WHERE TO STAY

Quinta La Paceña Posada, at Padilla and Ambrosetti, Tilcara (✆ **388/495-5098;** www.quintalapacena.com.ar), is a beautiful lodge located 4 blocks from the main plaza. Designed by owner architects Lili and César, the traditional-style building is crammed with heartwarming details such as cactus pillars and a tiny bamboo-covered walkway. The elegant rooms start at $55 (£37) for a double. **Rincon de Fuego,** Ambrosetti 445 (✆ **388/4271432;** www.rincondefuego.com), is another traditional-style town house with lots of old-world charm. The all-stone facade on a cobbled street hides luxury rooms with uneven adobe walls and bare rafters. Nothing is spared regarding comfort, with Andean-designed upholstery covering king-size beds. Rooms start at $60 (£41) for a double. **Refugio Del Pintor,** at Alvero and Jujuy (✆ **388/427-1432;** www.elrefugiodelpintor.com), is a modern two-story building done in the traditional style of rock walls and wooden ceilings. The tastefully designed rooms have lots of light and overlook a courtyard with lawn. They start at $60 (£41) for a double.

What to See & Do

Lying 20km (13 miles) south of Tilcara is the small colonial hamlet of **Purmamarca** ★★★. **Cerro de los Siete Colores (Hill of the Seven Colors)** dominates the village, reflecting its startling red and purple colors onto the pueblo's quiet streets and dusty adobe homes. Try to arrive early—9am is best—when the morning sun shines brightly on

Pachamama Parties

This area is famous for its street parties and thousands throng to Humahuaca at Carnaval time. For 8 days the entire population dons multicolored costumes and strums on indigenous instruments, known as erkes and charangos. They dress up as clowns and devils and mock politicians with puppets. The festival is a heady mix of Christianity and Indigenous rites, with the last day (known as Temptation Sunday) seeing a shaman burying offerings to Pachamama (Mother Earth) and the devil. Other popular parties are Santa Ana, on the 26th of July, in Tilcara, and the Virgen de Copacabana, in April. Every village has its own *fiesta patronal,* celebrating the local patron saint. One of the most lively and unusual is on the 15th of August in the town of Casabindo. Feathered gauchos steer a bull into an enclosure in front of the village church. Wrapped around the animal's horns is a scarf containing money, which is the prize to whoever is brave enough to grab it.

the hill's facade and reveals its tapestry of colors. In front of the plaza, you cannot miss the 400-year-old **Iglesia de Santa Rosa,** one of the country's oldest and most beautiful churches. Continue west on RN 16 for 73km (45 miles), and you reach the surreal landscape known as **Salinas Grandes** ★, a dazzling salt plain that stretches for miles.

Back on Route 9 heading north, after Tilcara, you will notice a trapezoid-shaped monument marking the Tropic of Capricorn. Nearby you can visit **La Garganta del Diablo (Devil's Throat)**—a steep gorge with a small walkway leading along the rock's edge. Leave RN 9 and head east of Tilcara for a short distance. Be careful walking here, as there is only a small rope separating you from the depths below.

Continue north along RN 9, where you will pass the small adobe villages of Huacalera and Uquia. About 42km (26 miles) north of Tilcara lies **Humahuaca,** a sleepy yet enchanting village of only a couple thousand Indian residents. Its relaxed pace will make Buenos Aires seem light-years away. Note that at an elevation of 2,700m (8,856 ft.), you will feel a little out of breath here, and nights are quite cold. Although the nearby Inca ruins of **Coctaca** are best explored with a tour guide, you can visit them on your own or with a taxi ($15/£10 round-trip, including driver wait time) by following a dirt road about 10km (6¼ miles) out of Humahuaca. Coctaca is a large Indian settlement that the Spaniards discovered in the 17th century. Although the ruins are hard to distinguish from the rocks and debris, you can make out the outlines of the terraced crop fields for which the Incas were famous. The site is surrounded by cacti and provides excellent photo opportunities.

4 TAFI DEL VALLE, TUCUMAN

1,299km (805 miles) NW of Buenos Aires; 406km (250 miles) S of Salta

"Why aren't the Americans coming to Tafi?" one frustrated hotelier asked me, and well he should wonder. Tafi del Valle is a high-altitude oasis of rolling green hills set amid red-rock desert. It is a remarkable place, yet it is not on the radar of many foreign travelers except

for a handful of adventurous Europeans. The drive there is fascinating; from the flat plains of sugar-cane country in Tucuman province, you go up a twisting road through cloud forests and lemon groves, an area known as **Selva Tucumana.** You pass the fascinating **Reserva Arqueológica los Menhires,** where you'll find a collection of 50 mysterious standing stones from prehistoric times. If you come from the Salta side, the dry desert changes dramatically and you twist through the misty mountain pass of **La Garganta del Diablo,** at 3,000m (9,480 ft.) above sea level. What was red and dry becomes green and temperate. Tafi del Valle itself is a popular mountain town set by a lake, frequented by Tucumanos, who come to escape the heat of their sweltering capital and take advantage of the excellent opportunities to fish, hike, and sail. Here you can enjoy laid-back country life by staying in some beautiful *estancias* set within the town limits and at half the price you will spend elsewhere.

GETTING THERE Tafi del Valle lies 107km (66 miles) west of provincial capital San Miguel de Tucumán on RP 307. **Empresa Aconquija** (✆ **0381/422-7620** in Tucuman, or 3867/421025 in Tafi del Valle; www.transporteaconquija.com.ar) offers daily buses; the trip takes 2 1/2 hours and costs $4.50 (£3.05). The same company also runs a daily route between Tafi and Cafayate 120km (75 miles) away. The small, modern terminal (✆ **3867/421025**) is on Avenida Gobernador Critto, close to Estancia Los Cuartos.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Oficina de Turismo,** Av. Miguel Critto 311 (✆ **3867/421880;** www.tucumanturismo.gov.ar), has no English-speaking staff and is a little short on flyers and maps. However, you can get a comprehensive list of lodgings in the area. One recommended adventure-tourism agency is **La Cumbre,** Avenida Presidente Perón 120 (✆ **3867/421768**).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Jesuitica La Banda Museo, La Banda s/n, Tafi del Valle (✆ **3867/421685**), is a quaint white chapel and colonial house displaying Jesuit furniture, Cuzco art, and Independence-era memorabilia. It is located close to the tourism office and is open Monday to Saturday 10am to 4pm, Sunday from 9am to noon. Admission is 70¢ (45p). **Los Menhires Archaeological Reserve** ★, at Avenida Las Menhires and Calle Nuñorca, El Mollar (no phone), is a fascinating collection of 150 standing stones gathered in a field. The military dictatorship had ripped these stones up from their original locations across the valley and used them to decorate a motorway. With some measuring 4m (13 ft.) in length, much has been lost of their meaning, but it makes for a fascinating 30-minute visit. The reserve is located 10km (6 1/4 miles) from Tafi del Valle, in the village of El Mollar. It is open daily from 7am to 6pm. Admission is free.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES & TOUR OPERATORS

There is a wealth of locations across the valley to explore, and Tafi is a hiker's paradise.

HORSEBACK RIDING **La Morocha Cabalgatas,** Galeria Los Arcos, Avenida Presidente Perón (✆ **3867/154-123135** [cell]; www.lamorochacabalgatas.com), will hook you up with some horses to explore the area.

TREKKING **La Cumbre,** Av. Presidente Perón 120 (✆ **3867/421768**), hosts treks around the lake and climbs to the nearby mountain known as Cerro Pelao. **Aucache Expediciones,** Felix Sosa s/n (✆ **3867/421378**), is another agency that conducts trekking excursions.

SHOPPING

Cheese is the valley's most famous product, and you'll find giant blocks of the cheddar-style local delicacy on every counter. Wool is also in abundance. **Cooperativa Union Diaguita,** Galeria Los Arcos, Avenida Presidente Perón (✆ **3867/421790**), makes sweaters, throws, and tablecloths from local wool using natural dyes. **Artesania Lilen,** Av. Presidente Perón 176 (✆ **3867/421496**), is good for a 20-minute browse through feathered wind chimes and ceramics. Owner Celina Garrido displays local art, including her own colorful landscapes and portraits. **Los Artesanias,** Av. Presidente Perón 252 (✆ **3867/421758**), and **Tinkus Huasi,** Av. Presidente Perón 120 (✆ **3867/420190**), are both crammed with local handicrafts.

WHERE TO STAY

Expensive

Estancia Jesuítica Las Carreras ★ Built in 1718 by the Jesuits, this working *estancia* has one of the oldest farmhouses in the province. Everything is maintained true to its original appearance, down to the whitewashed adobe walls and burgundy-colored tin roof. The rooms are sparkling clean and somewhat utilitarian, yet comfortable and pleasing, with terra-cotta tiles and tasseled bed covers. The farm is famous for its cheese-making tradition, which goes back nine generations. They also grow strawberries and raise Jersey cows. Half a mile from the town, it has a stunning mountain backdrop and a countryside feel.

RN 325, Km 13. ✆ **3867/421473.** www.estancialascarreras.com.ar. 6 units. From $140 (£95) double. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; museum; cheese factory; solarium; Wi-Fi.

Estancia Las Tacanas ★★ Las Tacanas is a genuine Jesuit *estancia* with all the frills. Stone walls, complete with a Virgin Mary grotto, surround a large historical *estancia* right in the heart of the town. The religious theme is continued inside with a bishop's gown displayed in the lobby and paintings hanging on whitewashed walls built by Jesuits 300 years ago. The four-poster bed was once the governor's, and the old saddles and blue ceramics belonged to the town's biggest landowners. That same family has now converted the farmhouse and stables into a luxury lodge with large spacious rooms and charming period furniture. An old oak tree stands in the ivy bordered central courtyard, and a line of comfy deck chairs sit among pillars overlooking a field-size garden. And yet, you are a 2-minute walk from main street!

Av. Presidente Perón 372, Tafi del Valle. ✆ **3867/421821.** www.estancialastacanas.com. 9 units. From $90 (£61) double. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards.

Moderate

Estancia Los Cuartos ★★ Value To stay in an Argentine *estancia* often requires a car and money. With Los Cuartos you need neither. Located within the town limits means there are no problems with access, and room rates of $60 (£41) per double means you do not have to break the bank to enjoy genuine 19th-century rustic splendor. The lodge sits in a large field surrounded by wood fencing. A low-slung corrugated roof shades a long gallery of dark pillars and white walls. The thick adobe keeps cool the very authentic, cottage-style rooms with green wooden doors and rafter ed ceilings. The low brass beds face windows overlooking the splendid central courtyard, and the tiny doors lead to a handsome dining room with an antique table and adjacent library. The small

bathrooms with chessboard tiling and bamboo ceilings only add to what is a genuine and good-value experience. The lodge also organizes horseback riding excursions.

Miguel Critto s/n. ✆ **3867/155-874230** (cell). www.estancialoscuartos.com. 7 units. From $55 (£37) double. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** Lounge; Wi-Fi.

Hostería Lunahuana This is the best modern option in the town, with excellent ambience and top-notch facilities. The modern building is built in the colonial style, with a welcoming lobby of warm earth colors and large windows that give lots of light. Scarlet walls lead to a large bar and tempting fireplace. The rooms are ample and attractive, some with lovely garden views and beautiful furniture. The bathrooms are smallish but clean, with tub/shower combinations. The larger triple rooms have a mezzanine. This *hostería* is for those who like modern luxuries.

Av. Gobernador Critto 540. ✆ **3867/421330.** www.hosterialunahuana.com. 32 units. From $95 (£64) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; tennis court; solarium.

Hotel Tafí The Hotel Tafí is a very basic hotel with beautiful views that will suit those who are not too fussy. Modern and plain, its deceptively pleasant lobby/breakfast room has tall ceilings and polished wooden floors. The rooms themselves are somewhat of a letdown, with little or no ambience and low, creaking beds. The furniture is monkish and decor nonexistent. However, the view in the morning is spectacular, with large windows revealing a pleasant garden and panoramic view of the valley and fields. Despite its pastoral surroundings, the hotel is located in the heart of the town. It's a decent budget option but with little atmosphere compared to the similarly priced Estancia Los Cuartos.

Av. Belgrano 177. ✆ **3867/421007.** www.hoteltafiweb.com.ar. 30 units. From $60 (£41) double. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** garden; lounge.

La Guadalupe This orange adobe lodge does not lack color: Multicolored sombreros hang on corn-yellow walls, and lamps hang from a ceiling of wooden beams. The rooms are welcoming, with private bathrooms and floral murals. Out front is a large pond, and behind are green rolling hills. A popular restaurant serves regional and international fare, and the delightful tearoom dishes out quality cakes and pastries.

Camino de la Costa 650. ✆ **3867/421329.** www.posadalaguadalupe.com.ar. 9 units. From $90 (£61) double. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; pool; solarium.

La Rosada Hosteria A mismatch of modern and colonial, La Rosada has a nice central courtyard with pink walls, strangely covered by a large metal shed. It feels like you are eating breakfast in a warehouse. However, you cannot fault the rooms for the price; they're some of the biggest I have ever stayed in, designed to accommodate up to four couples. Everything is newish and immaculately clean. The tiled bathrooms are well fitted, with tub/shower combinations. Located in the town center, La Rosada is a good choice for groups or families traveling on a budget.

Av. Belgrano 322. ✆ **3867/421323.** hosteriarosada@uolsinectis.com.ar. 16 units. From $60 (£41) double. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. No parking.

WHERE TO DINE

There are no fine-dining restaurants in town, with most places serving grilled beef and the local delicacy, kid goat. Main courses cost on average $7 (£4.75) without wine. **El Mangrullo Parrillada,** RN 307, Km 62 (✆ **3867/421554;** www.elmangrullo.8m.com),

The Fighting Spirit of Quilmes

The Indian community of Quilmes has fought off usurpers since colonial times and is still fighting today. Famous for keeping the Spanish at bay for over 150 years, they have now successfully beat back mining companies and hoteliers through road blockades and pickets. The focal point of such resistance is the fascinating ruins of **Quilmes** ★, located on Route 40, approximately halfway between Tafi del Valle and Cafayate. A field of giant cacti leads to an impressive hillside town with stone foundations—the remains of a thriving settlement built in A.D. 800 that once held 5,000 people. Rock walls make tidy terraces halfway up a hill toward the chief's house. You can climb the southern side to one of two pre-Columbian lookout posts. Below, you'll see the layout of a neatly divided town with the remains of square-shaped houses and circular storage rooms. At the front is a modern stone hotel built in the style of the ruins. Technically, the hotel is open, but the police tape and picketing Indians mean it has very few guests. The ruins are open for visits, however, from 8am to 7pm daily. Admission is $1.60 (£1.10), with an obligatory Spanish-speaking guide of dubious quality (✆ **381/1562-72329** [cell]; www.comunidadindiaquilmes.org).

is a traditional *parrilla* with a folkloric theme. The building is made from traditional adobe and stone, with large windows that give a commanding view of the valley. **Rancho de Félix,** at avenidas Belgrano and Presidente Perón (✆ **3867/421022**), is a cavernous building with cane ceilings. The menu includes *locros, humitas,* and empanadas. **Parrilla Don Pepito,** Av. Presidente Perón 193 (✆ **3867/421764;** www.donpepitodetafi.com.ar), has llama casserole on the board, as well as such fish as pejerrey and dorada. **Bar El Almacen,** at Avenida Presidente Perón and Gobernador Critto (✆ **3867/420129**), is a pleasant cream-colored bar and restaurant, serving kid goat and pastas.

5 LA RIOJA

1,142km (708 miles) NW of Buenos Aires; 704km (436 miles) S of Salta

As you travel through the province of La Rioja, red desert, sand-blasted plains, and giant cactus may give you the feeling you've wandered off the map. This destination has little history of tourism, but plenty to compel the most adventurous travelers, from cheap wine and a rich indigenous tradition to astounding natural Wild West scenery. It is also the base point to explore two of the most fascinating national parks in Argentina, the former dinosaur playgrounds known as Valle de la Luna and Talampaya.

La Rioja City, founded in 1591, is now an untidy mix of colonial town houses, ugly modern offices, and disorderly neighborhoods. Famous for its orange and jacaranda trees, the city is best visited in spring (Oct–Nov), as midsummer temperatures can reach a wilting 133°F (56°C). Intensely religious people, Riojanos hit the streets every December 31 to celebrate Tinkunaco, the "meeting" of Quechan and Catholic cultures.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Aeropuerto Vicente Almandoz Almonacid (✆ **3822/439211**) is 7km (4 miles) from the city center. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (✆ **0810/222-86527**) flies from Buenos Aires for $250 (£169) and $300 (£203), depending on the season and availability.

The **Terminal de Ómnibus,** or main bus station, is located at Ortiz de Ocampo Avenue and Circunvalación (✆ **3822/425453**). Buses arrive from Buenos Aires and travel to Salta, Catamarca, and other cities in the region. **Empresa La Riojana** (✆ **3822/435279**) offers buses daily to locations within the province such as Chilecito.

If you opt to rent a car, try **Winer Rent,** Santa Fe 642 (✆ **3822/425453**).

VISITOR INFORMATION & FAST FACTS The **regional visitor center** is located at Av. Pelagio B Luna 345 (✆ **3822/426384**). It is open weekdays from 7am to 9pm and weekends from 9am to 9pm.

Banco Río faces the main plaza and has a 24-hour ATM. The bank is open weekdays from 9am to 2pm.

TOUR OPERATORS **Runacay,** Villa Union (✆ **3825/470368;** www.runacay.com), and **Rolling Travel**, 25 de Mayo 36, 2nd floor, Córdoba (✆ **351/5709909;** www.rollingtravel.com), are the two local agencies that conduct 1-day tours of the national parks. Always make sure your guide is bilingual before booking.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

You might find yourself with an afternoon to spare in the city between tours to the parks. **Convento de Santo Domingo,** at Pelagio B. Luna and Lamadrid (no phone), is worth a visit. Built in 1623, this church is one of the oldest buildings in Argentina and a fitting memorial to the local indigenous folk who built it. While the Spanish preferred adobe, this church is entirely built of stone, with a wooden roof that has withstood the test of time. Especially interesting are the elaborately carved carob doors. It is open Monday to Friday 8am to 12:30pm and 4 to 8pm; Saturday to Sunday 9am to 1pm and 4 to 8pm. **Mercado Artesanal,** at Pelagio B. Luna and Catamarca (no phone), is a crafts market, where you will find genuine textiles and ceramics made in the area. It is open Monday to Friday 8am to 12:30pm and 4 to 8pm; Saturday to Sunday 9am to 1pm and 4 to 8pm. **Museo Folklórico,** Pelagio B. Luna 811 (no phone), is a rambling house of dark rooms and pretty courtyards built in 1692. The museum offers a ramshackle display of local mythology and customs, be it photographs of giant, holy rocks in the desert, or processions of Indians with mirrored headdresses. Interesting is the medieval-looking wine press made from cow skin or the side room containing silverware from a famous local silversmith. Open daily 9am to noon and 3 to 8pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Parque Nacional Talampaya ★★ The Triassic period is known as the age of dinosaurs. The 50-million-year-old era saw the first emergence of reptiles and flowering plants, and Talampaya National Park has captured it all like a perfect geological etching. Multiple layers of sediments have fallen on what used to be a tropical zone, allowing scientists to date and study, indeed discover, what life was like 200 million years ago through fossilized remains.

It also makes for some pretty spectacular scenery in a UNESCO World Heritage Site that covers more than 215,000 hectares (a half-million acres). The 150m-high (492-ft.) red sandstone walls are as sharp as diamond-cut marble. The park tour bus takes you

down this long spectacular gorge that is actually a dry riverbed. The area is one of the driest places on earth, where summer temperatures of 122°F (40°C) are common. You reach a half circle clearing that emits a perfect echo. Nearby 1,800-year-old rock paintings display birdlife and guanacos—a type of llama that still can be seen roaming this scarlet desert. Hard capstones sit precariously on soft pedestals, sculpted by the wind to appear like towers and cathedrals. One geomorphic rock looks like a tortoise. Talampaya is more picturesque than its sister park Ishigualasto, 80km (50 miles) away, which is more famous for its dinosaur fossils. The Talampaya tour is also more fun and informative, as the guide is with you throughout the 3-hour tour; but, again, remember to ask for a tour in English. There is no public transport to either park, so a taxi or tour company must be used from La Rioja, which is 2½ hours away, or from the small towns Villa Union or Valle Fertil. ***Note:*** Do not forget a hat, sunblock, and lip balm.

RP 26, Villa Union, La Rioja. ✆ **3825/470356.** www.talampaya.gov.ar. Admission $7 (£4.75). May–Sept daily 8:30am–5:30pm; Oct–Apr daily 8am–6pm. Passport required.

Parque Triásico Ischigualasto/Valle de la Luna ★★★ In 1991, local student Ricardo Martinez tripped across a skull while on a field trip with San Juan University. The glint of teeth encouraged him to dig some more until he uncovered an entire creature now known as an Eoraptor. It roamed this desolate part of Argentina 225 million years ago, making it one of the oldest dinosaur fossils in the world. Yet it is not quite the oldest; the oldest was discovered 1.6km (1 mile) away and is called a Herrerasaurus.

Parque Triásico Ischigualasto, otherwise known as Valle de la Luna (Moon Valley) is ground zero for dinosaur hunters. The 50,000-hectare (120,000-acre) site of yellow mushroom-shaped rocks and red cliffs is home to the bones of giant reptiles that are constantly surprising paleontologists who, every year, find new species. The entire evolutionary period of these grizzly dragons can be seen here, stretching over 255 million years, up until when they died out, approximately 65 million years ago.

The discoveries can be seen in a purpose-built museum at the park entrance. Curled vertebrate lie in fossilized nests, and giant two-legged monsters are frozen in time. One poignant display shows the remains of three cubs trapped in their lair. A full tour of the park takes 3 hours, a caravan of vehicles following a park ranger around the 40km (25-mile) circuit, stopping at different sites of interest. You see eerie rock formations and tall pillars of stone standing precariously in the wind. One fascinating place is the *cancha de bochas,* or bowling alley. This is a sandy bunker dotted with smooth black balls belched up from the bowels of the earth.

This UNESCO World Heritage Site takes some effort to see. Located in San Juan province, it is nevertheless a 6-hour drive from the provincial capital. Many people choose to stay in the nearby town of Valle Fertil. However, La Rioja city airport is 2½ hours away by car, and the road passes the just-as-stunning Talampaya National Park, meaning you can pack in two geological blockbusters in 1 day if you get up early enough. ***Note:*** The routine tours are in Spanish, and the guides are not very inspiring or knowledgeable. Best to call ahead and see if you can reserve an English-speaking guide, preferably one with a background in paleontology or geology. The park also conducts bike tours and full-moon excursions.

Los Baldecitos: no phone. San Juan; San Juan City office 25 de Mayo and Las Heras, San Juan. ✆ **264/422-7372.** www.ischigualasto.org. Admission $10 (£6.80). Apr–Sept daily 9am–4pm; Oct–Mar daily 8am–5pm. Passport required.

WHERE TO STAY

Naindo Park Hotel, San Nicolás de Bari 475, La Rioja (✆ **3822/470700;** www.naindoparkhotel.com), is the best hotel in La Rioja City. Its pink facade with white arches hides a building block of glass that is at once very modern, spotless, and completely without character. The rooms are smart, the furniture elegant, and the bed covers quilted. Rooms start at $100 (£68). **Plaza Hotel,** San Nicolás de Bari 502, La Rioja (✆ **3822/425215;** www.plazahotel-larioja.com.ar), is a six-story modern block facing the main plaza and houses well-appointed rooms of average size. It has a very pleasant rooftop pool overlooking the city. A double room comes in at $90 (£61). **Huayra Apart Hotel,** Av. Rivadavia 285, La Rioja (✆ **3822/464053;** www.huayraaparthotel.com), is a great value budget option, with large studio-style rooms starting at $40 (£27) for a double. **Libertador Hotel,** Buenos Aires 253, La Rioja (✆ **3822/427794;** www.libertadorhotel-lar.com.ar), is a small, modern city hotel with a nice lobby. Rooms are dwarfish but come in at a reasonable $40 (£27) for a double.

WHERE TO DINE

L'Stanza, Dorrego 164 (✆ **3822/430809**), is a small, atmospheric *parrilla* that often hosts live music. Local paintings hang on the walls, and the overall feel is elegant and well furnished. It is open Monday to Saturday noon to 3:30pm and 8pm to 2am, Sunday noon to 3:30pm.

Joaquin, avenidas Rivadavia and 9 de Julio (no phone), serves *lomitos* (steak sandwiches) and pizza, as well as the best Cuba Libre I have had in South America.

9

Córdoba & the Central Sierras

by Charlie O'Malley

A boisterous modern city and bracing rural hinterland attract thousands each year to the central province of Córdoba. Neat, tidy towns with majestic Jesuit ruins contrast with vast agricultural flatlands of rusting cereal silos and wind-battered billboards or the rolling green hills of the Punilla Valley. Villa Carlos Paz is a well-polished tourist trap with slick resorts offering watersports and golf. In La Cumbre, you can stay on a luxury *estancia* and partake in first-class hiking, horseback riding, and paragliding.

The industrious Jesuits made Córdoba their South American headquarters in colonial times. Their legacy is still reflected in a famous university tradition and a busy, prolific province that produces everything from soybeans and cars to the country's best graduates.

Córdobeses are Argentina's best-loved citizens, noted for their lilting accents and sharp sense of humor. They also have a talent for partying, with some notable get-togethers such as Oktoberfest in Villa General Belgrano and a famous traditional music festival in Cosquín every January.

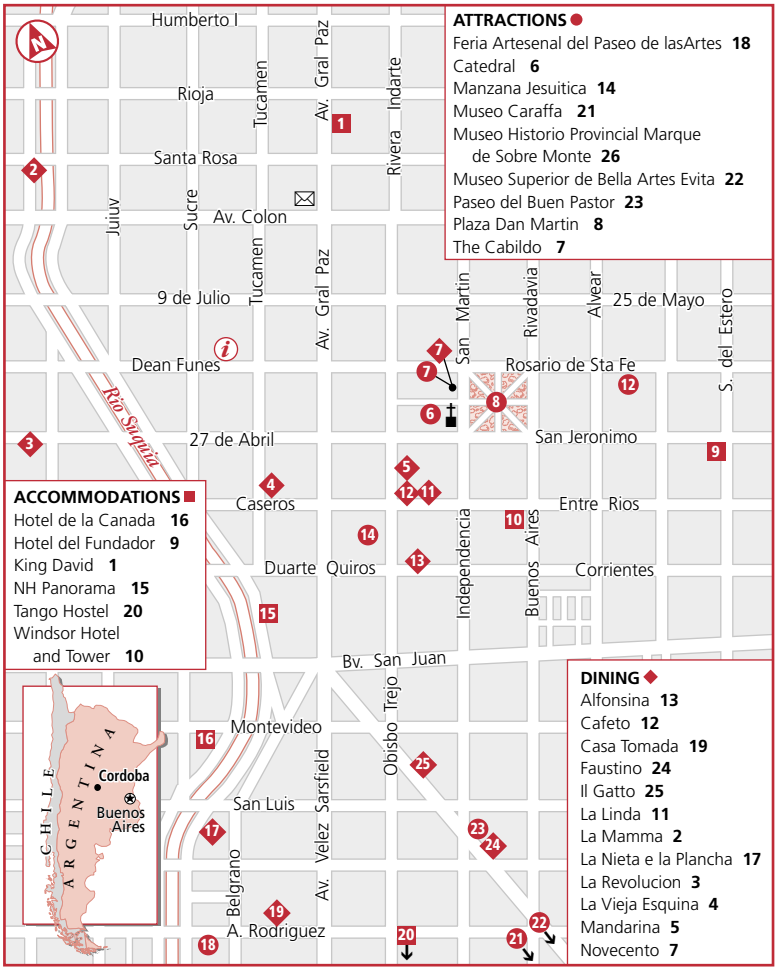
1 CORDOBA

713km (442 miles) NW of Buenos Aires; 721km (447 miles) NE of Mendoza

Stand on the corner of Yrigoyen and Buenos Aires streets and you'll see firsthand Córdoba's heady mix of religion, education, and modern industry. Argentina's second city has a bland backdrop of red-brick high-rises and boxed balconies punctuated with the occasional Gothic spire or colonial facade. Don't be deceived by first impressions of a dull Legoland. Beneath it all lies a young, vibrant city with lots of heritage, great bars and restaurants, and a considerable student population intent on having a good time.

This city of 1.3 million inhabitants was created as a stop for Spaniards traveling between Peru and the Atlantic coast. It was founded in 1573 by Jerónimo Luis de Cabrera. The Jesuits arrived at the end of the 16th century, opening Córdoba's university in 1613 and financing their projects by establishing six large *estancias* throughout the region. Today you can follow the "road of the Jesuit *estancias*" by arranging a tour with a local travel agent.

La Cañada, a waterway created to prevent flooding, is one of the city's symbols. Córdoba's most important historical sights line up around Plaza San Martín, including the Cabildo, cathedral, Marqués de Sobre Monte's residence, and the Jesuit Block. The Manzana Jesuítica, as the Jesuit Block is called in Spanish, developed not just as a place of worship, but also as an intellectual and cultural center that produced Argentina's top doctors and lawyers. It includes the Jesuit churches, the university, and a prestigious



secondary school. In 2000, it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and became a historic museum. The city still serves as an intellectual center, increasingly popular to foreign students who wish to study Spanish outside Buenos Aires.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

BY PLANE Córdoba is most easily reached by air, and there are numerous daily flights from Buenos Aires. **Aeropuerto Internacional Ing. Ambrosio Taravella** (also called Pajas Blancas; ✆ 351/475-0871 or 351/475-0874) sits 11km (6¾ miles) outside town.

Aerolíneas Argentinas (✆ 0810/222-86527; www.aerolineas.com.ar), **Lade** (✆ 0810/810-5233), **Sol** (✆ 0810/444-4765; www.sol.com.ar), and **LAN** (✆ 0810/999-9526; www.lan.com) operate here, with flights to Buenos Aires, Mendoza, Salta, Rosario, and Santiago de Chile. Buenos Aires flights cost approximately $160 (£109) one-way. **Gol** (✆ 0810/266-3131) also flies four times a week from Río de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil. **LAB Lloyd Aero Boliviano** (✆ 351/482-0614) has two weekly flights from Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

Taxis from the airport to downtown cost between $8 and $10 (£5.45–£6.80).

BY BUS The **Terminal de Omnibus,** or central bus station, is located at Bd. Perón 380 (✆ **351/433-1982** or 351/433-1987). Numerous companies serve destinations throughout Argentina. Travel times are approximately 10 hours to Buenos Aires, 12 hours to Mendoza, 30 minutes to Villa Carlos Paz, and 2 hours to La Falda. A one-way ticket from Buenos Aires should cost no more than $40 (£27); companies constantly offer promotions and change their prices frequently. I recommend you check with the tourism office or the bus station before booking your ticket. A tourism information office is situated in the bus station (✆ **351/433-1987**). **Rede Ticket,** Obispo Trejo 325 (✆ **351/428-0800;** www.redeticket.com.ar), is a booking agency located 4 blocks from the central plaza that charges the same as the bus companies in the station.

BY CAR The drive from Buenos Aires takes approximately 10 hours on RN 9, which is a good road.

CAR RENTAL To rent a small car costs $50 to $60 (£34–£41) per day. Try **Annie Millet-Hertz** (✆ **351/475-0581** or 351/475-0587; www.hertzenargentina.com.ar) or **Avis** (✆ **351/475-0815** or 351/475-0785; www.avis.com.ar) at the airport, or **Europe Rent a Car,** Entre Ríos 70 (✆ **351/422-4867**). **Budget,** San Jerónimo 131 (✆ **351/421-1240;** www.budget.com.ar), is located 1 block from Plaza San Martín.

VISITOR INFORMATION Córdoba's **Centro de Información Turística,** in the Cabildo (✆ **351/434-1227;** www.cordobaturismo.gov.ar), offers hotel and restaurant information and distributes small city maps. It's open daily from 8am to 8pm in summer, with shorter hours in winter. There are also branches at the airport (✆ **351/434-8390**) and at the bus station (✆ **351/433-1987** or 351/433-1982). They also provide information and maps on the entire region, such as La Falda or La Cumbre.

Getting Around

ON FOOT The old city of Córdoba is easy to explore on foot, with 24 blocks of pedestrian walking streets near the Cabildo. The heart of the old city spreads out around Plaza San Martín, in the southeast quadrant of Córdoba. Most of the historical sights lie in this area. Avenida Colón, which becomes Avenida Olmos, is the city's main street. **Centro de Información Turística,** in the Cabildo (✆ **351/434-1200**), organizes walking tours of the city in English. As a general rule, you should not walk alone in big cities at night. In Córdoba, this is especially true anywhere along the river.

BY BUS City buses are cheap and abundant, but only *cospeles*—50¢ (34p) tokens, available at kiosks around town—are accepted. **Córdoba City Tour** (✆ **351/424-6605**) is a double-decker bus that does English-language tours of the city, starting at Plaza San Martín.

BY CAR Driving is difficult in the city, and parking is almost impossible downtown. In Córdoba, taxis are bright yellow, while the safer and similarly priced *remises* (private, unmetered taxis) are light green. As is the case throughout Argentina, it is always safer to

hire a *remise* rather than flag a taxi on the streets. This is just an extra measure of security for the visitor—locals have no problems flagging taxis on the street.

BY BIKE Like any big city, cyclists should be aware of heedless drivers. Saying that, on bike is a lovely way to explore the park and plazas. **Córdoba Renta Bike,** San Martín 5 (✆ **351/421-8012**), charges $20 (£14), including helmets and maps.

Fast Facts Córdoba

Area Code The area code for Córdoba is **351.**

ATMs & Currency Exchange Two reliable exchange houses are **Maguitur,** 25 de Mayo 122, and **Barujel,** Rivadavia 97. There is also an exchange booth at the airport called **Global Exchange** (✆ **351/475-9038**). ATMs are commonplace in the city center, while the main Citibank is located at 25 de Mayo and Rivadavia.

Emergency For a medical emergency, dial ✆ **107;** for police, dial ✆ **100** or 351/428-7000; in case of fire, dial ✆ **101.**

Hospital The Hospital de Urgencias (emergency hospital; ✆ **351/427-6200**) is located at Catamarca and Salta.

Internet Access Telecom, with a branch on almost every corner downtown, provides Internet access for less than $1 (70p) per hour.

Pharmacy **Farmacia Virtual,** 27 de Abril 99 (✆ **351/411-1101**), is open daily until midnight.

Post Office The main post office, **Correo Argentino,** is at Av. General Paz 201.

Seasons Córdoba can be visited any time of year, although you should expect hot temperatures, stormy weather, and big crowds in January and February, and fairly cold temperatures June through August. In addition to peak summer season, tourist destinations also fill up during Easter week.

Spanish Classes The city is increasingly popular with study-abroad students who want to catch up on their Spanish, and long-term travelers who want to learn some vocabulary before heading farther. **Able Spanish,** Caseros 45 (✆ **351/423-3300;** www.ablespanish.com), and **Espanex,** Av. General Paz 55 (✆ **351/421-8954;** www.espanex.org), are two private institutions that can also organize volunteer work and internships.

WHERE TO STAY

Córdoba offers a wide variety of hotels. No stellar choices are available directly downtown, but better facilities can be found in the satellite towns. Parking is usually free for hotel guests.

Expensive

Holiday Inn Córdoba ★ (Value) One of the city's favorite hotels is situated between the airport and downtown, next to a large shopping complex and near the posh neighborhood of Cerro de las Rosas. Standard rooms are colorful, bright, and airy, with slightly larger rooms on the executive floor. The gorgeous pool is complemented by a fitness center, sauna, and state-of-the-art massage facility. The helpful staff will arrange airport

transfers, regional excursions, and sports activities upon request. You'll need to take a taxi or *remise* to the city center, about 10 minutes away. The hotel also functions as a convention center.

Centro Comercial Libertad, at Fray Luis Beltrán and M. Cardeñosa, 5008 Córdoba. ✆ **351/477-9100.** Fax 351/477-9101. www.holidayinncba.com.ar. 144 units. From $150 (£102) double; from $215 (£146) suite. Weekend promotions available. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; poolside bar; heated outdoor pool; fitness center; sauna; business center; room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

King David Flat Hotel ★★ (Value) In the heart of downtown, just a short walk from all the main attractions, the King David offers 110 modern and comfortable apartment-suites. Every unit has a separate living area with TV and sofa, a small but fully equipped kitchen with microwave and stove, and a spacious marble bathroom next to the smallish bedroom. The decor is contemporary, with light wood and large windows overlooking the city. The staff can be a little cold and unhelpful but will arrange transportation and tours if requested. When making reservations, be sure to ask for promotional rates, as the hotel often offers weekday discounts.

General Paz 386, 5000 Córdoba. ✆ **351/570-3528.** Fax 351/570-3535. www.kingdavid.com.ar. 110 units. From $85 (£58) apt for 2; $98 (£67) apt for 3; $117 (£80) apt for 4. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking $8 (£5.40) per car. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; tiny outdoor pool; small exercise room; business center w/free Internet; room service; laundry service; Wi-Fi in restaurant. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, safe.

Sheraton Córdoba Hotel ★★ Just outside the city center, next to a fashionable shopping mall, this five-star Sheraton is widely considered Córdoba's best hotel. Elevators shoot up the center of the 16-floor atrium lobby, which is decorated with rose-colored marble, California palms, and paintings by national artists. The rooms are spacious, though not huge. They are well appointed with marble tables and desks, large bathtubs, and views of either the city or mountains. Service is first-rate, although the hotel gets crowded when its convention center is booked. The restaurant is fairly standard, offering a la carte or buffet dining. The breakfast buffet is spectacular, with local and international fare. The piano bar is good evening fun. The Sheraton offers the most extensive list of amenities of any hotel in Córdoba.

Av. Duarte Quirós 1300, 5000 Córdoba. ✆ **351/526-9000.** Fax 351/526-9150. www.sheraton.com/cordoba. 188 units. From $250 (£170) double; from $280 (£190) deluxe; from $600 (£408) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; piano bar; heated outdoor pool; tennis court; fitness center; sauna; business center; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Moderate

Hotel de la Canada Spacious rooms with king-size beds and muted lighting make for a comfortable stay at the Hotel de la Canada. The 11-story red-brick high-rise has an excellent location, and the staff are super friendly. One of its most pleasant features is a first-story reading room and lounge, with old-world decor and comfy armchairs that invite you to sit back and relax, and escape the bustling city. A good midrange choice.

Marcelo T. de Alvear 580, 5000 Cordoba ✆ **351/421-4649.** www.hoteldelacaniada.com.ar. $85 (£58) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant bar; small outdoor pool; sauna; business center; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Hotel del Fundador This small hotel makes a good stab at being stylish and somewhat arty and would pull it off if it were not for the garish-colored walls, reproduction

furniture, and claustrophobic restaurant. Located 4 blocks from the terminal, the three-story modern town house has a spotlit lobby with white cube furniture; small, clean rooms; and decent bathrooms with glass bowl sinks. It is relatively well maintained and adequate for those who want a brief stay and quick getaway. Though, it must be said, the neighborhood could be better.

San Jeronimo 442, 5000 Cordoba. ✆/fax **351/428-1752.** www.hoteldelfundador.com.ar. 24 units. $70–$80 (£47–£54) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small outdoor pool; sauna; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

NH Panorama The NH Panorama is a 14-story brick box typical of the dreary architecture that has swamped Córdoba in recent years. Inside you'll find the marble countertops, sleek wood paneling, and minimalist furniture typical of this Spanish-owned hotel chain. The panorama of the title is a lovely view of the city plaza and distant hills, but be sure you get a high, west-facing room as otherwise you might just see more red-brick boxes. The location is perfect and the rooftop pool a welcome respite in summer. The restaurant could be better and the elevators faster, but, in general, the NH is a very efficient and businesslike hotel, much like its clientele.

Marcelo T. de Alvear 251, 5000 Cordoba. ✆ **351/410-3900.** www.nh-hoteles.es. $121 (£82). Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small outdoor pool; fitness center; sauna; business center; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Windsor Hotel & Tower ★ This centrally located hotel is the best choice near Plaza San Martín. Ask for a room in the more modern tower, built in 1999, rather than in the "Classic" section, where the rooms are ridiculously small. Rooms with king-size beds are larger than those with two twins. Also new are the rooftop pool, fitness room, and sauna. The fifth-floor Oxford restaurant enjoys an impressive view of the city, with good international cuisine. Piano music fills the lobby after 9pm, and the hotel staff will organize city tours and mountain excursions.

Buenos Aires 214, 5000 Córdoba. ✆/fax **351/422-4012.** www.windsortower.com. 82 units. $98 (£66) double; from $112 (£76) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; piano bar; small outdoor pool; fitness center; sauna; business center; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Inexpensive

Córdoba Hostel The red-brick high-rises from the roof terrace may not be the most inspiring sight, but within this bright, three-story building you will find a warren of dorms and double rooms with bright airy decor and the cheapest beds in town. Rainbow-colored walls with a '70s stucco effect may not be to everybody's taste but style is sacrificed for price and comfort, with a backyard pool and small bar to soothe any aesthetic misgivings and occupy those lazy afternoons. Definitely for the young and sociable.

Ituzaingo 1070, 5000 Córdoba. ✆ **351/468-7359.** www.cordobahostel.com.ar. 20 units, 5 doubles. No credit cards. Dorms $10 (£6.80) a bed; $28 (£19). No parking. **Amenities:** Bar; TV room; laundry service; excursions organized; Wi-Fi; Internet stations w/free access; roof garden.

Tango Hostel Córdoba is not long on the backpacker radar. The first hostel to establish itself as the place to throw your gear down is the Tango Hostel. This small, modern town house has a worn but homey feel, and its main asset is two extremely helpful owners. The four-bed dorms are not too claustrophobic, and the series of rambling communal rooms—TV salon, dining area, small bar, and little courtyard—means that there is

always some corner to hide away in and read your book, or, if the mood suits, to share a drink with some fellow traveler. The decor is somewhat plain except for the occasional splash of wall color, and the bathrooms are very basic. Perfect for those on a long trip and short budget.

Fructuoso Rivera 70, 5000 Córdoba. ✆ **351/425-6023.** 8 units, including 2 doubles. Dorms $10 (£6.80) a bed; private room $21 (£14). Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. No parking. **Amenities:** Bar; dining area; TV room; courtyard; Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO STAY OUTSIDE THE CITY

Very Expensive

Estancia El Colibri ★★★ Estancia El Colibri is a 170-hectare pocket of pastoral bliss a 45-minute drive from Córdoba airport. Crisscrossed with rivers, woods, and meadows, the luxury property is traversed by a lavender path that leads to a plush villa and gorgeous pool. The decor is elegant and comfortable, with flower-bedecked walls and red velvet seating. Four-poster beds take pride of place in ample-size rooms with period furniture and silver-framed mirrors. Bathrooms are startling white, with immaculate fittings. The friendly owners ensure guests are more than occupied with polo demonstrations, gaucho outings, and feastlike picnics beneath the trees. There are excellent wine tasting sessions in the well-stocked and atmospheric cellar, or you can just join the hummingbirds on the patio and enjoy this laid-back, rural paradise.

Camino a Santa Catalina Km 7, Santa Catalina, Córdoba. ✆ **352/546-5888.** www.estanciaelcolibri.com. 9 units. From $595–$715 (£404–£486) double; from $775–$930 (£527–£632) suite. Rates include full board. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; heated outdoor pool; fitness center; sauna; business center; room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

WHERE TO DINE

In addition to the restaurants listed below, the most elegant *parrilla* in town is **Alcorta,** Figueroa Alcorta 330 (✆ **351/424-7452;** www.alcortacarnes.com.ar), serving the best cuts of beef in the city, with entrees from $10 (£6.80). The best Italian restaurant is **La Mamma,** at Santa Rosa and La Cañada (✆ **351/421-2212**), with homemade pastas, veal scaloppini, and an incredible lasagna (main dishes cost on average $17/£12). **La Nieta e' la Pancha,** on Belgrano 783 (✆ **351/468-1920**), offers typical food such as *locro, humitas,* and homemade pastas and empanadas, and here you can also try the ubiquitous *mate* tea so loved by locals. Meals cost around $10 (£6.80).

Expensive

Faustino ARGENTINE This well-appointed *parrilla*-style restaurant has two branches; in Parque Sarmiento and Paseo del Buen Pastor. Its air-conditioned interiors are modern and attractive, and the menu offers the traditional-style *asado* with never-ending dishes of delicious beef. The bathrooms are immaculate—down to the ice cubes in the urinals.

Av. del Dante s/n. ✆ **351/460-1853.** Main courses $23 (£16). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–4pm and 8pm–1am.

San Honorato INTERNATIONAL Named after the patron saint of bread bakers, Saint Honorato, this cool Mediterranean-style restaurant used to be a bakery. Needless to say, all the bread is homemade and fresh. The specialty is homemade ravioli with salmon filling. The restaurant is an old-fashioned town house with lots of atmosphere,

and it has a well-stocked wine cellar with such exclusive wines as Achaval Ferrer and Terrazas de los Andes. It is 10 minutes by taxi from the city center, in the upscale district of General Paz.

Corner of Pringues and 25 de Mayo. ✆ **351/453-5252.** Main courses $21 (£14). AE, MC, V. Lunch Tues–Fri 12:30–3pm; dinner Mon–Thurs 8:30pm–midnight, Fri–Sat 8:30pm–12:30am.

Moderate

Alfonsina ★ ARGENTINE Fancy a traditional *mate* while surrounded by gaucho paraphernalia such as saddles and horseshoes? Alfonsina is one of the few places that serves hot pots of Argentina's herbal obsession *mate* (usually enjoyed at home or in the open air). Despite the old-world decor of tall ceilings and bare brick walls, this restaurant bar has a youthful, arty clientele that dines on typical student cuisine such as *lomitos* (steak sandwiches) and *milanesa.* The 22 varieties of pizza include fugazza, a deliciously simple combination of onion, olives, and oregano. Alfonsina has a second reincarnation on the bustling courtyard Casa Tomada, shared with other bars, the entrance to which is Belgrano 763.

Duarte Quiros 66. ✆ **351/427-2847.** Main courses $10 (£6.80). No credit cards. Tues–Sun 6pm–1am.

Cafeto Value INTERNATIONAL A small ivy-covered courtyard with tall doors and cream-colored walls leads to an attractive bar with white globe lamps and red shelves. The menu includes a Nordic-style salad heavy with cured ham and beet root. Main courses include pink salmon and chicken stuffed with prawns. Wednesday to Friday, there are special gourmet dinners with wines selected from the in-house cellar. This pleasant eatery also has a nice relaxed vibe for casual morning-coffee drinkers. It also has Wi-Fi.

Caseros 88. ✆ **351/422-4579.** Main courses $10 (£6.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Tues 8:30am–9pm; Wed–Sat 8:30am–12:30am.

Casa Tomada ★ Finds ARGENTINE A warren of stalls and tiny stores have popped up in a large, rickety building on Achaval Rodriguez. If you follow the chessboard floor tiles right to the back, the building opens up into a large courtyard that is packed with laughing locals most nights of the week. Here amid the bare brick walls and on a series of worn wooden decks, you'll find the popular Casa Tomada, a boisterous bar with a student clientele. A stage at the back holds the occasional live performance, and, if you wander too far, you'll find yourself in another bar called Alfonsina that spills out onto Belgrano Street, on the other side of the block. The whole complex has a lively underground feel and is perfect as a startup to a lengthy night on the tiles.

Achaval Rodriguez 260. ✆ **351/15-384-4609** (cell). Main courses $10 (£6.80). No credit cards. Tues–Sun 6pm–1am.

El Rancho Viejo ARGENTINE A beautiful, traditional *parrilla* situated in the university city, the building is made entirely of stone, with a traditional roof and plenty of greenery surrounding it. Their specialty is kid goat.

Av. Rogelio N. Martínez 1900. ✆ **351/468-3685.** Main courses $15 (£10). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3:30pm and 8:30pm–midnight; Sun 8:30pm–midnight.

Il Gatto ARGENTINE This slick, diner-style restaurant has black-and-white photos on red walls, arty square lamps, and giant golden balls to distract your attention from a very pedestrian menu of pizza, pasta, cake, and coffee. Out front is a wooden platform patio to perch upon and watch the busy street traffic go by.

H. Yrigoyen 181. ✆ **351/568-0090.** Main courses $10 (£6.80). No credit cards. Daily 7:30am–1am.

La Linda COFFEEHOUSE Big and popular, La Linda has gaucho pictures on the walls that match the regional dishes on the menu such as empanadas and *locro*. Its overall ambience is bright and airy, if a little sterile and workaday. It is a popular coffee stop for locals who hang around to talk politics and the economy beneath attractive tapestries hanging on corn-yellow walls. Friday nights see the occasional live music folklore band.

Paseo Caseros. No phone. Main courses $10 (£6.80). No credit cards. Mon–Fri noon–3:30pm and 8pm–12:30am.

La Revolucion ARGENTINE Here you step into one of the hippest restaurant bars in the city, popular with students who like to muse over their beers on metal tables amid pink-striped walls holding frames of old-world labels. The place mats celebrate the Argentine Declaration of Independence and bear regular fare such as chicken dishes and pizza. The small zinc bar and the old town-house feel mean La Revolucion is a nice mix of old and new, with lots of atmosphere.

27 de Abril 633. ✆ **351/428-0190.** larevolucion@arnet.com.ar. Main courses $15 (£10). No credit cards. Mon–Tues noon–3:30pm; Wed–Sat noon 3:30pm and 9pm–12:30am.

Mandarina ★ ITALIAN This eclectic restaurant, along the pedestrian walkway Obispo Trejo, is a cornucopia of surreal and occasionally sexual artwork. The city's cultural crowd comes for salads, pizzas, and pastas and later for wines, whiskeys, and wacky cocktails. Freshly baked breads and jams prepared with fresh fruits add to Mandarina's appeal. The best wines on the wine list are Zuccardi, Terrazzas, and Chandon.

Obispo Trejo 171. ✆ **351/426-4909.** Main courses lunch $10 (£6.80), dinner $14 (£9.45). AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–2am.

Novecento ★★ ARGENTINE This attractive, somewhat trendy restaurant is part of the city museum complex and offers the perfect pit stop while doing the city's Jesuit circuit. Bronze statues of hounds, peasants, and gods circle a tiled courtyard with plants and an arched gallery. A balcony looks down on deck chair–style seating. Inside you'll find a tall glass ceiling and traditional bar with old-style furniture. Provoleta (grilled provolone cheese), risotto, and pasta are all on the menu, as well as salmon and the fish of the day.

Cabildo, Dean Funes 33. ✆ **351/423-0660.** Main courses $12 (£8.20). No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–4pm and 8pm–1am.

Inexpensive

La Vieja Esquina (Value) ARGENTINE This is a tiny corner diner that any *Cordobesa* will tell you does the best empanadas in town. It does a thriving business in home delivery; and no wonder, as this atmospheric little place has room for a small counter bar and little else except brick walls framed with wood and old baskets hanging overhead. Perfect for a quick snack on the go, or a handy number to have if you get peckish in your hotel room early evening.

Corner of Caseros and Belgrano. ✆ **351/424-7940.** Empanadas 30¢ (20p). Mon–Sat 11am–3pm and 7:30pm–midnight.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Córdoba City Tour (✆ **351/424-6605**) buses explore the main tourist spots in town. The tour lasts 1½ hours, visiting 40 sights, so it is especially good if you're spending only a short time in Córdoba; you'll see a lot in under 2 hours. The double-decker red buses leave from Plaza San Martín daily Thursday to Tuesday at 4pm and 6pm. The tour costs

$9 (£6.10). The tourism office also arranges 2-hour English-speaking walking tours of the city for $15 (£10). Call in advance the **Tourism Information Office,** Rosario de Santa Fe 39 (✆ **351/428-5600;** guiasdecordoba@hotmail.com).

Catedrál ★ Construction of the cathedral, situated next to the Cabildo, began in 1577 and took nearly 200 years to complete. No wonder, then, that the structure incorporates such an eclectic mix of styles, heavily influenced by baroque. On each of the towers, next to the bells, you will see Indian angels created by—and in the image of—indigenous people of this region. The dome was painted by Emilio Carrafa, one of Córdoba's best-remembered artists. Visitors are free to enter the church but should respect the Masses that take place at various times during the day.

Independencia 72, at Plaza San Martín. ✆ **351/422-3446.** Free admission. Daily 8am–noon and 4–7pm.

Manzana Jesuítica ★★★ The Jesuit Block, which includes the Society of Jesus' Church, the Domestic Chapel, the National University of Córdoba, and the National School of Monserrat, has been the nation's intellectual center since the early 17th century. Today the entire complex is a historic museum, although the churches still hold Masses, the cloisters still house priests, and the schools still enroll students.

The **Domestic Chapel,** completed in 1668, was used throughout much of its history for private Masses and religious studies of the Jesuits. Having practiced their building skills on the Domestic Chapel, the Jesuits finished the main church, called the **Compañía de Jesús,** in much the same style in 1676. Built in the shape of a Latin cross, the Compañía de Jesús is the oldest church in Argentina. Its nave was designed by a Belgian shipbuilder in the shape of an inverted hull, which was the best way to make use of the short wood beams available for construction at the time. The dome is all wood—no iron is found anywhere—and the beams remain fastened with raw cowhide. The gilded altarpiece was carved in Paraguayan cedar, indicative of baroque design. At each of the church's wings stands a chapel, one of which has often been used for university graduation ceremonies.

In 1613, the Jesuits founded the **National University of Córdoba,** the oldest university in Argentina and one of the continent's longtime academic centers. With most of the university (including the medical and law schools) having moved elsewhere in the city, the majority of rooms here now form part of the historic museum. You can visit the Hall of Graduates, the main university library, and the exquisite Jesuit library holding roughly 1,000 books dating back to the 17th century; the books are primarily in Latin, Greek, and Spanish, with the exception of a complete Bible from 1645 written in seven languages. Many of the original books in the library were secreted to Buenos Aires when the Jesuits were first expelled from the Americas, but some are slowly being returned.

The Jesuit library leads to the **National College of Monserrat,** which opened in 1687 and quickly became one of the country's top public secondary schools. Walking around the cloisters, you can see the classrooms as well as exhibits of early science machines used for mechanics, electronics, magnetics, color, and sound. During the academic year, you will also find students at work here. You can enter the Compañía de Jesús, the university patio, and the Colegio Nacional de Monserrat free of charge. For $1 (70p), you can also visit the Domestic Chapel and the Hall of Graduates.

Obispo Trejo 242. ✆ **351/433-2075.** Free admission; tours $3.50 (£2.40). Tues–Fri 10am–12:30pm and 2–4:30pm; Sat 10am–1pm. 40-min. guided tours in English Tues and Thurs 3pm; in Spanish Tues and Thurs 11am. Call in advance to arrange an English-language tour.

Touring the Jesuit Estancias

The next time you sip a satisfying glass of Argentine wine, thank the Jesuits of Córdoba. These resourceful monks planted South America's first vineyards in Córdoba in the 16th century, as they required wine to celebrate the Eucharist. They also needed priests, and, for this reason, they established a college in the city, one of the earliest on the continent. Córdoba soon became the headquarters of the entire South American arm of the Jesuits. In 1621, the college was renamed the University of San Carlos. By the 18th century, the city was known as Córdoba Docta, or Learned Córdoba, the undisputed cultural capital of the Vice Regency of La Plata.

To fund such expansion, the Jesuits operated six flourishing *estancias* around the province—three near the town of Jesús María. Produce from their orchards, farms, and vineyards not only paid for students' tuition but funded a massive construction project of beautiful churches and residences. You can still view five of these today, which is a delightful way to get off-road and step back in time.

To visit a provincial Jesuit *estancia,* contact the tourist office, hire a car, or sign up with a local travel agent, such as **Stylo Viajes,** Chacabuco 325 (✆ **351/424-6605** or 351/421-8012; stylo@arnet.com.ar), or **Córdoba Nativo,** 27 de Abril 11 (✆ **351/424-5341;** www.cordobanativoviajes.com.ar). A 1-day tour to three *estancias* costs $45 (£30).

Estancia de Alta Gracia ★ Another UNESCO World Heritage Site, Estancia de Alta Gracia is now the town center of a sleepy municipality by the same name, 25km (16 miles) south west of Córdoba city. The *estancia*'s beautiful buildings are situated around the central plaza. On-site is an interesting museum, known as La Casa del Virrey, named after an ex-resident, Santiago de Liniers, Viceroy of the River Plate.

Av. Del Tajamar and Solares. ✆ **354/742-1303.** info@museoliniers.org.ar. Admission 60¢ (40p). Free on Wednesday. English guides available. Apr–Nov Tues–Fri 9am–1pm and 3–7pm, Sat–Sun and holidays 9:30am–12:30pm and 3:30–6:30pm; Dec–Mar Tues–Fri 9am–8pm.

Estancia de Caroya Less grand than Estancia Jesús María nearby, this quaint building with a pretty courtyard and a small Spanish-style chapel is the oldest of all the *estancias.* Built in 1616, it was used as a holiday home for foreign scholars, and

Museo Caraffa ★ Raw concrete walls and all glass walkways are the main features in this modern art gallery, with somewhat brutalist architecture contrasting with its original classical-style facade. The multimedia exhibits are surreal and arresting, such as a photomontage of a gaucho arguing with a priest as he hoses water on an injured football player or video loops of children playing in a backyard. Some of the art is hit-and-miss, with frequent exhibitions by local students and art graduates. Named after a famous local painter, the Caraffa is worth an hour of your time to experience the vibrant local art scene.

an arms factory during the independence wars. It still boasts the ruins of an abandoned mill and dam. It is a 20-minute walk from Jesús María town center.

Av. 28 de Julio . ✆ **352/542-6781.** Admission $2 (£1.35). Tues–Fri 8am–6pm; Sat–Sun 9am–3pm.

Estancia de Jesús María Close to the laid-back t own of Jesús M aría, 19km (31 miles) north of Córdoba City, this is one of the best conserved and most visited Jesuit *estancias.* The 17th-century church and r esidence form a U-shape ar ound a well-tended garden. A pond, woods, and small g raveyard give the place an idyllic feel. Its history is fascinating; wine made her e was the first American wine ser ved to the Spanish r oyal family. In the Museo Jesuític o, you'll find colonial objects and paintings, as w ell as old winemak ing equipment. The *estancia* is a 300m (984-f t.) walk from the town. Follow Avenida Juan B. Justo north, turn left onto Cleto Peña, and follow a dirt track until you reach the entrance.

Pedro Oñar te s/n. ✆ **352/542-0126.** mjn.jm@coop5.com.ar. Admission $2 (£1.35). M on–Fri 8am–7pm; Sat–Sun 10am–noon and 2–6pm. Guided visits in Spanish at 9, 10, and 11am.

Estancia de Santa Catalina This was the biggest and most impor tant of all the *estancias.* Now in private hands, it is largely closed to the public but still w orth visiting f or its beautiful location and the mag nificent chur ch on the pr emises, which is still ac cessible. The amazing bar oque-style interior, funded b y cattle raising, is one of the most valued w orks of c olonial ar chitecture in the c ountry. It is approximately 19km (12 miles) west of Jesús María, on an unpaved road.

Road north of Ascochinga on Rte. E-66. ✆ **352/542-1600.** Admission 30¢ (20p). No English-speaking guides. Tues–Sun 10am–1pm and 3–7pm.

Estancia la C andelaria To r each this lonely UNESC O World Heritage Sit e 120km (73 miles) nor thwest of C órdoba, y ou must driv e acr oss a high-altitude plateau of mountain g rass and follow a r oute through charming riv ers and wat erfalls. Because of its isolation, it 's not as elaborat e as its sist er establishments. Serving as both a sanctuary for Christians and a fort against hostile indigenous tribes, it has a more austere feel, yet it's nonetheless charming and majestic. One of its main functions was to provide mules for the long trip to the silver mines of Bolivia.

Cruz del Eje, Valle del Norte and Sierras Grandes. ✆ **351/433-3425.** Admission 30¢ (20p). No English-speaking guides. Daily 10am–6pm.

Av. Poeta Lugones 411, Plaza España. ✆ **351/433-3414.** museocaraffa@gmail.com. Admission $1 (70p); free on Wed. Tues–Sun 10am–8pm. Guided tours in English Tues–Fri 11:30am; Sat–Sun 4:30pm.

Museo Histórico Provincial Marqués de Sobre Monte ★★ The largest colonial house to sur vive intact in Argentina, this historical museum was used as the 18th-century home and office of the first S panish governor of Córdoba. Completed in 1772, the house sho wcases the to wn's early colonial histor y. The go vernor's commer cial and office rooms were downstairs, with the more intimate family rooms upstairs. An amazing collection of period furniture fills the bedrooms; public spaces display religious paintings,

military uniforms, a rifle collection, early saddles and leather wear, and an 18th-century chamber organ.

Rosario de Santa Fe 218. ✆ **351/433-1661.** Admission 60¢ (40p). Mon–Fri 9:30am–3pm.

Museo Superior de Bellas Artes Evita ★★★ Sumptuous, stylish, and modish are just some of the words I would use to describe Córdoba's latest art gallery. It is located in the fabulous Palacio Ferreyra, a gorgeous French-style mansion once owned by one of the province's richest and best-established families. Gilded baroque collides with 20th-century brashness, and the result is a charming afternoon of smiles and surprises. One such shock is the modern, pitch-black staircase. As you ascend, you realize it is covered entirely in hairy cowskin. Other contrasts include the high, ornate ceilings and the futuristic Perspex furniture in the airy cafe with ample balcony. Mosaic floors, golden wallpaper, and glass-draped walls means this architectural gem has been renovated with a modernist flourish. The excellent exhibits range from 18th-century Cuzco art to 1960s Argentine pop. One giant room is dedicated to the Mendocinean artist Carlos Alonso and his dark disturbing commentaries on the Dirty War. A must-see.

Hipólito Yrigoyen 511. ✆ **351/434-3636.** vguiadas.palacioferreyra@gmail.com. Admission $1 (70p); free on Wed. Tues–Sun 10am–8pm. Guided visits in English Tues–Fri 3pm; in Spanish Sat–Sun 11am, 3 and 5pm.

Paseo del Buen Pastor ★★ Kids Occupying a triangular city block, El Paseo del Buen Pastor is a modernist maze of cafes, restaurants, exhibition rooms, and art gardens. Located in a former women's prison that is now dedicated to those who suffered under the dictatorship, the complex is a bewildering display of surreal art, glass-framed walkways, and rust-colored flagstones. Stark metal pillars and driftwood installations contrast with a convent-style chapel. Green-molded seating and psychedelic cowhide restaurant menus give a futuristic nod, as does the over-the-top light-and-water show featuring a fountain display to a Freddy Mercury soundtrack. The fountain show takes place every day at 7 and 11pm. There is a small cinema, a supervised children's area, and a selection of stores and cafes.

Av. Hipólito Yrigoyen 325. ✆ **351/411-1312** or 351/411-1213. Free admission. Daily 10am–10pm. Daily guided visits in Spanish 10:20am and 12:20, 2:20, and 4:20pm; English noon Sat.

Plaza San Martín and the Cabildo ★ The 400-year-old plaza orients the city, with General San Martín facing the direction of Mendoza (from which his army crossed into Chile and later Peru to liberate them from Spanish rule). Exhibitions, fairs, and impromptu markets are frequent events on the plaza. The **Cabildo** stands on the plaza's west side. During the military dictatorship of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Cabildo functioned as police headquarters and was used, as acknowledged by a small sign along Pasaje Santa Catalina, as a clandestine center for detention, torture, and execution. Today the Cabildo is a friendlier place, used mainly for cultural exhibitions and events.

At Deán Funes and Independencia. ✆ **351/428-5856.** Tues–Sun 9am–1pm; daily 4–9pm.

Shopping

Feria Artesanal del Paseo de las Artes is an excellent antiques and handicrafts fair on Achaval Rodríguez and La Cañada on Saturday and Sunday (3–10pm in winter, 6–11pm in summer). Close by is an indoor market known as **Casa Tomada,** Achaval Rodríguez 260. This former 1940s bakery now houses a dozen design stores selling leather goods, jewelry, antiques, and clothes. Out back is a pleasant courtyard with restaurants. It is open Tuesday to Sunday from 5 to 10pm. **Mazamorra,** Rivadavia 153 (✆ **351/**

423-0513), is an artisans' cooperative specializing in locally made handicrafts. It is open daily from 9am to 7pm. **Utopia,** Rosario de Santa Fe 67 (✆ **351/411-4197;** www.hecatombeyarmonia.com.ar), has traditional and modern handicrafts, including weavings and silverware. **Varietal Vinoteca,** Av. Vélez Sarsfield 801 (✆ **351/428-1887;** www.varietalvinoteca.com.ar), is a plush wine store dispensing Argentina's top brands, including Catena Zapata and Achaval Ferrer. **Vinos y Habanos** (✆ **351/15-200-0322** [cell]; www.vinosyhabanos.com) goes one step farther and delivers boutique wines and cigars to your hotel room. **SBS,** Caseros 79 (✆ **351/423-6448;** www.sbs.com.ar), is one of the best bookstores in town with a better-than-average English-language section. **Patios Olmos,** avenidas San Juan and Velez Sarsfield (✆ **351/570-4100;** www.patioolmos.com), is the city's plushest shopping mall, located in an old renovated college in the downtown area. It houses a wide variety of designer stores and a multiscreen cinema.

Outdoor Activities

A number of tour and adventure companies offer excursions into the Sierras de Córdoba, where it is possible to mountain climb, hike, mountain bike, horseback ride, hang glide, and fish. Try **Estación Uno** (✆ **354/349-2924**) or **Explorando Sierras de Córdoba** (✆ **354/343-7901**), both of which offer discovery tours into the mountains, bird-watching, horseback riding, and overnight camping trips.

Golf is big in Córdoba. Six world-class 18-hole courses are scattered around the city, and an additional two are a half-hour drive away. The **Jockey Club** and the **Córdoba Golf Club** are the most popular. Log on to www.golfencordoba.com for detailed information. The site is available in both English and Spanish.

CORDOBA AFTER DARK

The **Cabildo** serves as a cultural center, with occasional evening events including tango on Friday evenings. For $2 (£1.35), you can get a crash lesson in tango at 9:30pm every Friday, and then try to dance the rest of the night away. **Teatro Libertador San Martín,** Vélez Sársfield 366 (✆ **351/433-2319**), is the city's biggest theater, hosting mostly musicals and concerts. The smaller **Teatro Real,** San Jerónimo 66 (✆ **351/433-167071**), presents more traditional theater. You can pick up current theater, comedy, and special events information in the "Espectáculos" section of the daily paper, *La Voz del Interior.* **El Arrabal,** Belgrano 899, at Fructuoso Rivera (✆ **351/460-2990**), is a bar that hosts excellent tango, *milonga,* salsa, and folkloric shows most nights, open daily from 10am to 2am. A tango dinner show costs $21 (£14).

Culture aside, the next best thing to do in Córdoba at night is do as the locals do and party until sunrise. One of the best bars is **Johnny B. Good,** Av. Hipólito Yrigoyen 320 (✆ **351/424-3960**). Giant cardboard cutouts of Paul McCartney, Bono, and the Edge may unsettle your appetite as you munch through typical American food. Amid all this star power is a very nice cake display. It's pure rock 'n' roll. Happy hour takes place weekdays from 7 to 9pm. La Canada is a popular area for bars and open-air drinking. **Bar X** is one of the most famous establishments. A number of upscale discos are located in the Chateau Carreras neighborhood; the most popular is **Carreras,** at Avenida Cárcano and Piamonte. The rest of the city's nightlife is concentrated along Boulevar Guzmán, in the north of the city, and in Nueva Córdoba along Avenida Hipólito Yrigoyen. One of the best disco bars in this area is **Mitre,** Marcelo T. de Alvear 635 (no phone). The El Abasto neighborhood has a more alternative music scene, with live performances of rock, reggae, jazz, and folklore. **Dorian Grey,** Las Heras and Roque Saenz

Peña (✆ **351/15-403-1626** [cell]), and **Eras Groove House,** Las Heras 218 (no phone), are two of the best known venues, hosting everything from punk to techno. The district of Cerro de las Rosas is another haunt for night owls. It is famous for good restaurants, such as *parrilla*-style **Rancho Grande,** Av. Rafael Núñez 4142 (✆ **351/481-1529**), and Italian restaurant **Restorante Italiano,** Av. Rafael Núñez 3803 (✆ **351/482-7730**). Another decent eatery is **Il Gatto,** Av. Rafael Núñez 3856 (✆ **351/482-7780**). At night, the area is bustling with people frequenting pubs and disco bars all centered around the main drag Avenida Rafael Núñez. **Villa Agur,** Tristán Malbrán 4355 (✆ **351/481-7520**), is a trendy nightclub in an old and beautiful English-style house, near the Mirador del Cerro, where you can enjoy a great view of the city while you sip on the local brew, Fernet with cola. There is also a restaurant and a bar with live music.

Córdoba is famous for its own type of music called *cuarteto.* Panned by the critics and looked down on by rock aficionados, it is nevertheless a catchy blend of violin, piano, accordion, and bass. It is a foot-tapping alternative to the sometimes bland *rock nacional* you hear everywhere else. You can catch it live at several venues in the city, but beware: It attracts hysterical crowds and it's definitely down-market, for slummers only. For more information, call the **Asociación Deportiva Atenas,** Aguado 775 (✆ **351/471-5658;** www.atenas.com.ar), the **Estadio del Centro,** Santa Fe 480, or **La Vieja Usina,** Avenida Costanera and Coronel Olmedo (✆ **351/424-5743**).

2 VILLA CARLOS PAZ ★

36km (22 miles) W of Córdoba

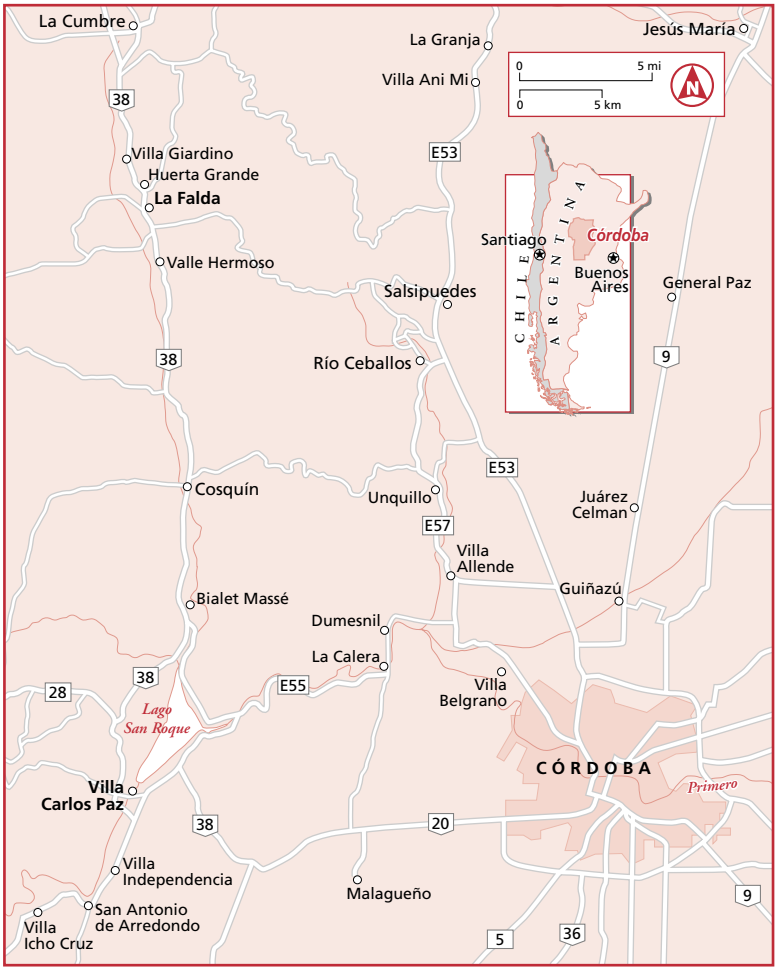
A quick getaway from Córdoba, Villa Carlos Paz surrounds the picturesque Embalse San Roque. It's actually a reservoir, but vacationing Cordobés and Porteño families treat it like a lake and swim, sail, jet-ski, and windsurf in its gentle waters. Year-round, people come to Villa Carlos Paz to play outdoors by day and party by night, with disco-bound buses transporting the youth of Córdoba back and forth. The city of 44,500 inhabitants really comes alive in January and February, when more than 200,000 tourists a month pay a visit. Live theater, comedy shows, music, and dancing fill the night air, and no one seems to sleep. Yet you don't have to be a nocturnal animal to enjoy Villa Carlos Paz—the area's quiet lakeside resorts are a more serene alternative.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The N20 is a fast, new highway (toll 30¢/20p) that goes directly from Córdoba to Villa Carlos Paz. The drive takes no more than 40 minutes, except on Sunday evenings, when *Córdobeses* vacationers return home from the mountains. Bus transportation to Villa Carlos Paz is frequent and reliable and leaves from the city bus station and Mercado Sur (Bd. Illia 175, at Ituzaingo). **Chevallier** buses to Buenos Aires take about 10 hours.

VISITOR INFORMATION There are two **tourism offices,** at San Martín 600 and San Martín 400 (✆ **354/143-6688** or 354/142-1624). They are open daily from 7am to 9pm. The staff provides information on hotels, restaurants, and tourist circuits around the city.

GETTING AROUND Villa Carlos Paz is small and easy to explore on foot. The city is safe to walk in, but it can get extremely crowded in the high season (Dec–Jan).



WHAT TO SEE & DO

There are no special sights in the city, save a 7m-high (23-ft.) cuckoo clock that, for no good reason, has become the city's symbol. Daytime activities focus on the lake and excursions into the surrounding hills. It's not clear why the city allows so many water activities in a reservoir. In any case, swimming, sailing, windsurfing, trout fishing, and—at least, for the time being—jet-skiing are all possible. Villa Carlos Paz is also well positioned for the many driving circuits through the Punilla Valley and into the mountains. These include treks to waterfalls, Jesuit ruins, and mountain *estancias*. In summer, buses disguised as trains run city tours. **Bus Panorámico** (✆ **354/143-4587**) costs $4 (£2.70)

and lasts 90 minutes. You can call directly for departure times or take them from Avenida San Martín and Belgrano, in front of the bus station, or ask at the tourism office. City tours are worthwhile if you don't have time to meander on your own; they're also a good way to get to know the lay of the land before venturing out on your own.

WHERE TO STAY

The area is very well furnished in terms of accommodations. Choices vary from well-run resorts to simple cabins by the side of the road. If you have been overdoing it on Argentine steak and wine, check into **La Posada del Qenti Health Resort,** RN 14, Km 7.5, 5152 Villa Carlos Paz (✆ **354/149-5715;** www.qenti.com). This plush villa surrounded by hills is brimming with enthusiastic staff intent on restoring you to your former glory.

Hipocampus Resort & Spa Kids A bumpy back road leads to this hidden retreat, a white colonial house resembling an old Spanish mission. Its two pools sit on a cliff overlooking the lake, and each of the guest rooms has a balcony with a beautiful water view. Rooms are uniquely decorated, and many have hardwood floors and colorful linens. Bathrooms are small, however, with showers only. The hotel offers a cozy fireside sitting room, as well as a small library and TV area. The restaurant serves regional dishes as well as afternoon tea, and the gracious staff makes this feel more like a B&B than a hotel. Excursions, horseback riding, and hiking trips can all be arranged at the reception desk.

Calle Brown 240, 5152 Villa Carlos Paz. ✆ **354/142-1653.** www.hipocampusresort.com.ar. 46 units. $100 (£51) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 outdoor pools (1 heated, 1 for kids); tennis courts; gym; spa; hydro-massage; sauna; Wi-Fi; salon; activities desk; horseback riding; hiking. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, safe.

Lake Buena Vista Resort & Spa ★ Kids On the shore of San Roque Lake, this modern resort of giant lagoon-type pools and terra-cotta walls is a great place in which to relax and soak up the sun. The apartment-style rooms are light and airy, with large balcony windows, blue-tile floors, and the occasional ceramic urn. The bedrooms are adequate, and kitchenettes are well equipped.

Enrique Zárate 83, 5152 Villa Carlos Paz. ✆ **354/143-5892.** www.lakebuenavistaresort.com. Off season $80 (£54) double; high season $120 (£81) double. Extra person $15 (£10). Breakfast optional. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Poolside bar; heated pool; gym; spa; airport transfers; babysitting; solarium; Wi-Fi. *In room:* Kitchenettes.

Portal del Lago Hotel ★ The striking wood-frame lobby here leads directly out to the main pool and spacious grounds bordering the lake. The hotel forms a half-moon shape along the banks of the lake, and most of the rooms have water views. Brick walls and dark woods give you the sense of being deep in the mountains, and there are many sitting areas for relaxing. Guest rooms vary in size, although all bathrooms are small; some rooms have two levels and multiple beds to accommodate families. A warm therapeutic pool, sauna, and gym are on the top floor, and a lake-view restaurant extends along the mezzanine of the lobby. The hotel also houses a convention center. The place can be crowded in summer months; try to make reservations in advance. The hotel's many stairs prevent access to those with disabilities.

Gobernador Alvarez, at J. L. Cabrera, 5152 Villa Carlos Paz. ✆ **354/142-4931.** Fax 354/142-4932. www.portal-del-lago.com. 110 units. $140 (£95) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 3 outdoor pools; gym; sauna; room service; Wi-Fi. In room: A/C, TV, safe.

Parque Nacional Quebrada del Condorito

Quebrada del C ondorito (w ww.quebradacondorito.com.ar) is a spec tacular 800m (2,624-ft.) ravine and popular haunt f or condors and their fledgling offspring learning t o fly. It is the most east ern habitat in S outh America f or this giant bird, and the area is littered with waterfalls, sierra grassland, and sloping hills. In 1995, the Quebrada and 40,000 hectares (98,900 acres) of the surrounding Pampa de Achala (a high-altitude plateau) became a national park.

The park's infrastructure is minimal, to say the least. There are three campsites, but they offer little in the wa y of facilities. Visitors enter the park from La Pampilla, 55k m (34 miles) of stunning sc enery southeast of Villa C arlos P az. From t wo lookout posts , y ou can sometimes sp y the bir ds bathing beneath waterfalls. The first is called *balcón norte,* and it's a 3-hour walk fr om the park entrance. The next vantage point is called *balcón sur,* which is another 2 hours into the park. Condors are shy birds, and sightings are not guaranteed, yet the area itself is a very special hiker's paradise. The park is home t o 20 animal species unique to the area. **Nativo Viajes** (✆ **351/424-5341**) runs an 8-hour trek, in Spanish only , thr ough the park . **Itati V iajes,** 27 de Abril 220, C órdoba (✆ **351/422-5020;** www.itati.com.ar), staff s English-speak ing guides who conduct different kinds of tours, all involving trekking and bird-watching. One-day tours start at $50 (£34).

WHERE TO DINE

Villa Carlos P az lacks gourmet r estaurants with the dining-out emphasis firmly on steakhouses—this is Argentina after all. There are plenty of good, casual eateries in the city's center. The two best *parrillas* in town are **Carilo,** Yrigoyen 44 (✆ **354/143-1346**), and **La Volanta,** San Martín 1262 (✆ **354/142-2954**). The latter is easy to spot—look for loud green-and-yellow paint and the carriage sitting on the roof. For excellent Italian dishes, try **Il Gato Trattoria,** at Libertad and Belgrano (✆ **354/143-9500**), and **Parrilla Los Gauchos,** Bd. S armiento 1007 (✆ **354/143-2814**), both of which offer fish and meat dishes, too. The latter one has got a beautiful vie w of the lake. I f Mexican is your thing, try Oaxaca, Uruguay 93 (✆ **354/143-7550**). **Junior B,** Av. Libertad 200 (✆ **354/143-3559;** www.juniorb.com.ar), dispenses decent pizza and pasta. Ask for *lomito de mollejas,* a sweetbreads sandwich.

VILLA CARLOS PAZ AFTER DARK

Many young—and even not-so-young—people come to Villa Carlos Paz from Córdoba to drink and dance, and some of the discos arrange private caravans from the city. Expect a late night out—dancing begins after 2am and continues past dawn. B y far, the most famous disco is **Keop's,** R.S. Peña and Seneca (✆ **354/143-3553**), with **Zebra Restobar Disco,** Bernardo D'Elia 150 (✆ **354/142-7130**), placing second. **Terrazzo,** Av. Atlántica 400 (no phone), is a tr endy disco open only in summer time. For something tamer, visit the **Punta Hidalgo** piano bar, at the corner of Uruguay and Hidalgo (✆ **354/142-1127**). **Casino Carlos Paz** is located at Liniers and U ruguay (✆ **354/142-5772**).

Carlos Paz, in summer, is famous for its theatrical cabaret acts, with well-known actors from Buenos Aires transplanting themselves here for the season. The best-known venues are **Teatro del Sol,** Calle Gral Paz 250 (✆ **354/142-2393**), and **Teatro Candilejas II,** Pasaje Nini Marshal (✆ **354/142-2314**).

3 LA FALDA ★

70km (50 miles) NW of Córdoba

An excellent base from which to explore the Punilla Valley, La Falda (literally, "lap of the mountain") lies between the Valle Hermoso (Beautiful Valley) and the Sierras Chicas. Argentines come here for rest and relaxation, not wild entertainment. Crisp, clean air; wonderful hikes; and quiet hotels are the draw. The city's main tourist site is the once-prestigious (but now decrepit) Hotel Edén, which entertained international celebrities in the early 20th century.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Frequent buses travel from both Córdoba and Villa Carlos Paz. The most comfortable is **TranSierras** (✆ **354/842-4666**), costing about $3.50 (£2.40). If you are driving, you have the option of going first to Villa Carlos Paz and then to La Falda via the N38. Or you can bypass Carlos Paz by taking the new A73, which branches off from the N20 a few miles before Carlos Paz. The trip takes 2 hours from Córdoba.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** is inside the old train station at Av. España 50 (✆ **354/842-3007**). Open Monday to Saturday from 8am to 9pm, Sunday 10am to 5pm. It provides city and regional maps as well as hotel, restaurant, and tourist information.

GETTING AROUND You can walk around the small center, but you will probably want to hire a driver, rent a car, or sign up with a tour operator to explore the Sierras Chicas (although you can always hike as well). La Falda's main road is Avenida Edén, which extends from the town center to the old Hotel Edén.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

You come here first and foremost to relax. Once that's accomplished, visit the once prestigious **Hotel Edén** (east end of Av. Edén). During the first half of the 20th century, it hosted the likes of Albert Einstein, the Duke of Savoy, two presidents of Argentina, and other members of Argentine high society. The hotel fell out of favor after World War II, because its owners had been Nazi sympathizers. Boarded up by 1960, the castlelike hotel was left to ruin. The insides have been completely gutted, but, amazingly, the entrance fountain still operates. Ninety-minute guided tours run daily between 10am and 6pm. Admission is $7 (£4.75). There's a bar adjacent to the ghost lobby with pictures of the grand old dame in its day. Outside the city, various adventure agencies offer horseback riding, trekking, mountain biking, hang gliding, and 4WD excursions into the Sierras Chicas. Contact Polo Tour, Av. Edén 444 (✆ **354/847-0795**), for details. You might also consider taking a taxi, which is inexpensive, toward La Cumbre, where numerous handicrafts shops and stands dot the road.

WHERE TO STAY

Expensive

Estancia Los Potreros ★★ The Begg family has been farming in this emerald pocket of Argentina for four generations. Their pastoral paradise of 2,000 hectares (4,940 acres), 600 cows, and 140 horses offers the ultimate gaucho experience with a refined, Anglo-Argentine twist. Set high in the Sierras Chicas, the gleaming, whitewashed cottage buildings feature old polished stoves, clunky wooden trunks, cozy raftered ceilings, and big welcoming brass beds (water bottles included). What the *estancia* lacks in opulence (it is a genuine *estancia* after all), it makes up for in sparkling cleanliness, well-equipped attention to detail, and superb personal service. At least one member of the family is on hand at all times, and dinner is a heartwarming and gregarious affair in the family dining room. Boasting some of the best horses in Argentina, Los Potreros is a riders' paradise. Guests here are generally the sort who prefer to spend more time in the saddle than in the pool. The six rooms include a cute honeymooners' cottage straight out of a Hans Christian Andersen story. The *estancia*'s address is La Cumbre, but it is actually accessed from a mountain road behind the Hotel Edén in La Falda. With that said, it is much easier to get there from the eastern side, via Río Ceballos.

Casilla de Correo 4, La Cumbre. ✆ **011/6091-2692.** www.ride-americas.com. 6 units. $360 (£244) per person, all-inclusive including airport pickup. Minimum stay 3 nights. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; Wi-Fi; horseback riding.

Moderate

Hostal L'Hirondelle ★ Never mind the term *"hostal";* in this case, it's an architectural distinction, rather than a reference to a budget traveler's dormitory. The house looks like a French chalet, surrounded by gardens and the Sierras Chicas. In a tribute to his poet son, the owner has given each individually decorated room a poet's name. On the second floor, Walt Whitman enjoys a corner view of the pool, courtyard, and nearby mountains. French prints and old bottles and spices decorate the long wood dining room, where guests enjoy half-board (breakfast and dinner) in summer months. Breakfast includes tea, croissants, fruit, cereal, homemade sweets, and fresh juice. For city folks unaccustomed to clear, starry nights, the owner has set up a telescope for celestial viewing. The staff will help you arrange outdoor activities, including hiking and horseback riding, as well as airport transfer upon request.

Av. Edén 861, 5172 La Falda. ✆ **354/842-2825.** www.lhirondellehostal.com. 21 units. Summer $46–$51 (£31–£34) double; $70 (£47) triple; Winter $36–$48 (£24–£32) double; $51 (£34]) triple. Summer rates include half-board; winter rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; game room; babysitting; laundry; TV room w/video library; Wi-Fi. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

La Parrilla de Raúl ★ ARGENTINE A popular *parrilla* with a distinctive family atmosphere, Raúl's menuless system works like this: First, help yourself to the salad bar, an assortment of mixed vegetable dishes, cabbages, stuffed eggs, candied sweet potatoes, and other delights. As you finish your salad, the first meat course will land on your plate, likely a tender slice of pork with a *cerveza* sauce (yes, beer sauce). Next comes thick chorizo and a rich piece of *morcilla* (blood pudding). No stopping here—*costilla* (a beef rib) is next. Ready for more? Following the rib is *matambre,* another delicious morsel of beef. At this point, you can politely request that they stop bringing you meat, or you can wave on more. Request a large soda, and they will bring you a 1.25-liter bottle to help

 wash it all down. Finish your meal with a trip to the dessert bar, an enticing table of flans, fruits, creams, and the obligatory *dulce de leche.* Then go hit the gym.

Av. Buenos Aires 111. ✆ **354/842-3181.** Main courses $9–$13 (£6.10–£8.80). No credit cards. Daily noon–3pm and 8:30pm–midnight.

4 LA CUMBRE ★

93km (57 miles) NW of Córdoba

La Cumbre could best be described as Little England, with its cottage-style bungalows, rose gardens, and rolling golf courses. The colony of Anglo-Argentines who settled here were intent on creating their own corner of "that green and pleasant land," and they have done so with considerable success. It must be one of the few towns in South America where the town plaza is quietly forgotten, and the commercial center is situated several blocks away. Famous for its boarding schools and retirement homes, this sleepy town is not for thrill seekers, unless, of course, you are into first-class paragliding. Other activities include great trekking, horseback riding, and golf.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The bus station is on General Juan José Valle 50, in the town center. Frequent buses travel from Córdoba. **TranSierras** (✆ **351/424-3810**) operates from the Córdoba bus station. The trip costs about $6 (£4.05) and takes around 2 hours. **El Práctico** (✆ **011/4312-9551**) and **General Urquiza** (✆ **011/4313-2771**) are two companies that come from Buenos Aires, a 12-hour trip.

If you are driving, you have the option of going first to Villa Carlos Paz and then on to La Falda via the N38. Other towns you'll pass are Huerta Grande and then Villa Giardino. This is a pleasant trip through the valley, but be ware of flash floods in the summer.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** is inside the old train station at Av. Caraffa 300 (✆ **354/845-2966**). Open daily from 8am to 10pm, it provides city and regional maps as well as hotel, restaurant, and tourist information. A respected agency specializing in outdoor pursuits in the area is **Sendas Travel,** Calle Dumas 110, La Cumbre (✆ **354/853-2177;** www.sendastravel.com). **Cuchi Corral** (✆ **354/815-570951;** www.cuchicorral.com) specializes in paragliding from the mountain cliff of the same name.

GETTING AROUND You can easily walk around the small town center but you may soon get bored. Most of La Cumbre's attractions are outside the town, usually up a dirt track, so it is advisable to rent a car or sign up with a tour operator. There is no public transport going east or west.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

La Cumbre is becoming increasingly famous for adventure sports, particularly **paragliding** ★. A beauty spot called **Cuchi Corral** ★ is a 300m (984-ft.) cliff that overlooks the Rio Pintos valley. Here you'll find a variety of amateurs and professionals hurling themselves into the air and soaring with condors. In 1999, the town hosted the World Paragliding Championship. Other sights worth seeing include **Estancia El Rosario,** 6km (3¾ miles) southeast (✆ **354/845-1257**), home of the ubiquitous *alfajores*—a *dulce de leche* biscuit sandwich popular all over Argentina, and a must-buy souvenir for visiting

tourists. In the nearby village of Cruz Chica, you'll find **El Paraíso** (✆ **354/849-1596**), the home of famous Argentine writer Manuel Mujica Lainez and now a museum dedicated to this fascinating character's life. To the north of La Cumbre, near the village of Capilla del Monte, is a mountain known as **Mount Uritorco,** popular with trekkers. The mountain is also a mecca for fans of the supernatural, with a reputedly unique energy source and powerful healing properties. The area is famous for UFO sightings as well. You can investigate this phenomenon at a specially built UFO center called OVNI Center, Intendente Cabus 237, Capilla del Monte (✆ **354/845-1257**). Farther east, along a dirt track, you'll find **Parque Natural Ongamira,** a weird and wonderful moonscape of pink rock amid green rolling hills.

WHERE TO STAY

Expensive

Dos Lunas ★★ Sheep graze on the expansive lawn like silent lawn mowers, while a giant circular swimming pool reflects the second moon in the *estancia*'s title. Dos Lunas offers the best of both worlds—a lodge that affords the countryside experience without sacrificing luxury. The century-old building is genuinely pioneer-built, with Prussian blue window shutters, tin roofs, and wrought-iron lamps. Yet the interior design is pure urban, boutique chic. Giant, modern rooms have striped bedsheets, subtle lighting, and wicker toilette kits at the end of each king-size bed. Bathrooms are also generously sized, with showers and tubs. The dining room is a fabulous salon of red lamps, darkly polished oak furniture, and black roof rafters. The two living rooms are decked out with DirecTV, board games, an honor bar (no barman, just a book to note your liquor consumption), and a library collection that includes the diary of the original owner—an English lady who mostly complained about water problems. The tidy stables exude country glamour, and the horse treks across the 3,000-hectare (7,410-acre) property are both scenic and invigorating. A young Porteño couple named Gonzalo and Lorena runs the place with efficient attention to detail and bilingual charm. The *estancia* is situated on a country lane, a 45-minute drive north of La Cumbre.

Alto Ongamira, Todos los Santos, Ischillin. ✆ **11/15-6219-5390** (cell). www.doslunas.com.ar. 8 units. $250 (£170) apts. Rates include all meals. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; honor bar; outdoor pool; TV room; library; board games; Wi-Fi.

Moderate

Hotel La Viña This charming, ivy-covered, red-brick house is a good budget choice. Its leafy location is close to the town center, affording good views of the mountains. The old-style furnishings and cavernous dining room make you feel like you are on a school outing to your grandmother's. The owners, the Zampieri family, make you feel at home, right down to the homemade scones and jam. Some rooms are spacious and pleasant, while others are monastically bare. Everything is perfectly clean and respectable, and the garden pool beckons.

Caraffa 48, La Cumbre. ✆ **354/845-1388.** www.hotellavina.com.ar. 19 units. $41 (£28) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; TV room.

Los Cedros Posada Kids A long driveway takes you up to a well-endowed mansion of red tiles and white walls, with a glorious pool out front. Family-run Los Cedros consists of three buildings, the oldest of which was built in 1929. Here you will find a well-furnished interior of bright yellow walls, floral curtains, purple sofas, and brick walls. The rooms are of a good size, with built-in wardrobes and large bathrooms (most of which

have tubs). A sunroom with wicker chairs overlooks the swimming pool, and the dining room in the back has an unhindered view of the Sierra. In the basement, you will find a large activity room with Ping-Pong tables. Staff members are extremely helpful, and the chef is the most famous in La Cumbre.

Av. Argentina 837, La Cumbre. ✆ **354/845-1028.** www.posadaloscedros.com. 25 units. $82 (£55) double; $103 (£70) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; activities room w/Ping-Pong table; Wi-Fi.

WHERE TO DINE

La Cumbre has the usual variety of *parrillas,* and many specialize in kid goat, a local delicacy. **La Casona del Toboso,** Belgrano 349 (✆ **354/845-1436**), is one such place, with a nice cottage-house feel and fresh trout on the menu.

La Fontana ★ INTERNATIONAL La Fontana is a bright, cheerful restaurant with excellent food and service. As you wait for your order, the waitress brings a thirst-quenching aperitif of white wine and fruit juice, accompanied by delicious hors d'oeuvres of cheese and sweet corn in tiny cupcakes. The bread is so fresh, it is hot, and one variety comes with melted cheese. The menu is a refreshingly eclectic mix, including a zesty Waldorf salad, *parrilla,* homemade pasta, and seafood, including octopus and paella. While this white-walled corner restaurant might have a few too many tables, the atmosphere is very welcoming, the toilets immaculate, and the prices very reasonable.

Belgrano and Peperina, Villa Giardino (btw. La Falda and La Cumbre). ✆ **354/849-1455.** Main courses $6–$8 (£4.05bp]5.40). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–3:30pm and 8pm–midnight.

5 ALTA GRACIA ★

35km (21 miles) SW of Córdoba

Calamuchita Valley, south of Córdoba, is a booming agricultural zone dotted with large reservoirs. Alta Gracia is one of the main towns, situated in the foothills of the Sierra Chica, 35km (21 miles) south of Córdoba. It is famous for its Jesuit-built town center (p. 248), but its commercial center is not so pretty. Once a popular haunt for wealthy Porteños escaping the summer heat, it still boasts some impressive summer villas in the residential zone. The town itself is a good base for hiking, fishing, or several lazy rounds of golf.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The **bus station** (no phone) is located at C. Paravachasca and Nieto. Every 15 minutes, buses travel from Córdoba. The journey takes 1 hour and costs $2 (£1.35). **Sarmiento** (✆ 351/425-5541) and **Sierras de Calamuchita** (✆ 351/422-6080) are two companies worth investigating. The latter runs service farther south to Villa General Belgrano.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **tourist office** is located at the clock tower, Calle Padre Vieryra and Calle Del Molino (✆ **354/742-8128;** www.altagracia.gov.ar). It's open daily from 8am until 9pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Alta Gracia's main attraction is the Jesuit *estancia* at its center (p. 248). Although the town has attracted its fair share of the rich and famous over the years, none became quite

as well known as a shy school boy with asthma known as Che. **Museo Casa de Ernesto Che Guevara** ★, Villa Nydia, Avellaneda 501 (✆ **354/742-8579** or 0810-555-2582; museocheguevara@altagracia.gov.ar), is a suburban home where the legendary revolutionary spent much of his childhood. There you can see some of his personal possessions and correspondence—some addressed to his old buddy-in-arms, Fidel Castro. Admission is 90¢ (60p) and it is open Monday 2 to 7pm and Tuesday to Sunday 9am to 8pm. For a good 5km (3-mile) walk, make for the Jesuit ruins of **Los Paredones,** past the poetic Park García Lorca. The walk includes a view of the **Gruta de Lourdes,** a shrine popular with pilgrims in February, and a replica of the famous French grotto. There is a large reservoir known as **Los Molinos** 37km (23 miles) south of town. It is popular for watersports and angling for trout and *pejerrey.*

OUTSIDE TOWN

One of the province's biggest festivals is the Oktoberfest in **Villa General Belgrano,** 52km (32 miles) south of Alta Gracia and 88km (55 miles) from the capital. This German settlement's population was boosted by interned sailors from the Graf Spee in the war years. A quiet, leafy resort town most of the time, it comes alive the first half of every October with a beer jamboree spiced up with a generous helping of genuine German sausage. For more information, try the village **tourist office,** Av. Roca 168 (✆ **354/646-1215;** www.vgb.gov.ar), open daily from 8:30am to 8:30pm.

WHERE TO STAY

During high season—in summer, July, and Easter—rooms fill up and prices jump accordingly. **Hostal Hispania,** Vélez Sarsfield 57, Alta Gracia (✆ **354/742-6555;** $35/£24 double), is an old residence with large, comfortable rooms and a fine veranda overlooking the sierras. The Spanish owners serve delicious tapas. For something more modern and plush, try **Solares del Alto Hotel,** Bd. Pellegrini 797, Alta Gracia (✆ **354/742-9086;** www.solaresdelalto.com; $80/£54 double, including breakfast, heated pool, gym facilities, and Internet). **El Potrerillo de Larreta,** Los Paredones, Km 3, Alta Gracia (✆ **354/743-9033** or 743-9034; www.potrerillodelarreta.com; $120/£81 double), is a plush country club with beautiful wood-paneled bedrooms and a rolling green golf course. Farther south, in Villa General Belgrano, you'll find a charming Swiss-style hotel: **Berna Hotel,** Vélez Sarsfield 86 (✆ **354/646-1097;** www.bernahotel.com.ar; from $68/£46 double), is an attractive, efficient hotel with a large garden and pool.

WHERE TO DINE

Hispania, Urquiza 90, Alta Gracia (✆ **354/742-6772**), serves delicious paella, washed down with sangria. Highly recommended for dessert is the *crema catalana.* Another restaurant with an international menu, **Morena,** Av. Sarmiento 413, Alta Gracia (✆ **354/742-6365**), is in a lovely old house. **Brunnen,** Av. Roca 73, Villa General Belgrano (✆ **354/646-1832**), serves German fare and brews a very decent house beer. Visitors can tour the microbrewery out back. **Choperia Blumen,** Av. Roca 356, Villa General Belgrano (✆ **354/646-2568**), is another good source for reliable German food and draft beer.

10

Mendoza, the Wine Country & the Central Andes

by Christie Pashby

Here, in the land of sunshine and good wine, life is lovely. With the gorgeous, high Andes mountains forming a dramatic backdrop, and rows upon rows of Malbec in the foreground, Mendoza is a very pretty place, one where you'll want to linger, relax, and feel good. The ultimate Mendoza moment is at a country lodge, with a *copa* in hand, vines at your side, and the mountains in front. Deeply connected to the land, Mendocinos, the smiling residents of this delightful city and vast province are relaxed, creative, and so very friendly. They feel lucky to live in the "land of *sol y buen vino.*"

Capital of the Province of Mendoza, the city of Mendoza is an oasis amid an almost desertlike high plain, somewhat of a miracle, and a testament to the hard work and determination of local pioneers. If you consider that only 5% of the entire province is cultivated, and that the area receives around 15 centimeters (6 in.) of rain per year, you'll realize the achievement of the simple shade cast by the many giant sycamore trees that line the towns. Thanks to a vast network of aqueducts and dikes, which run through the rural vineyards and even through the heart of Mendoza city, grapes and olives have been harvested to international standards. The most famous grape here is Malbec; it's of French origin, but since storming to global attention in the early 2000s, it has put Argentine wine on the map.

In the past few years, wine exports have jumped 30%, helped significantly by investors and experts from Europe. Tourism is following suit and booming likewise. Fortunately, it is growing from the ground up. Locals continue to live as always, but now they welcome visitors into their lives—into their homes, their family farms, and their vineyards.

There is a lot to see and do here. The first decision to be made is whether to stay in the city or out in the wine country. Downtown makes a good base for people who like nightlife, cafes, and strolling on their own. Country inns (and there are some outstanding ones) will be better for those who want to relax and soak up as much of the wine scene as possible. Either way, after spending a few days exploring the *bodegas* (wineries) close to the city, don't miss a day of adventure in the *alta montaña,* or high mountains—rafting, horseback riding, or trekking. If you are staying in the country, take a *remise* or taxi into town for a leisurely day visiting museums, enjoying restaurants and the lovely plazas of downtown Mendoza. Blending time in the lovely city of Mendoza with time in the quiet wine towns is ideal.

You should spend at least a day exploring Mendoza's old city—visiting the plazas, and wandering about Parque General San Martín—before heading for the wine routes that wind through the most important wine-producing zones of Mendoza.

HOTELS
- Bohemia **1**
- Damajuana Hostel **3**
- Deptos Mendoza **15**
- El Portal Suites **8**
- Hotel Argentino **11**
- Park Hyatt Mendoza **13**
- Plaza Italia B&B **6**
- Sheraton Mendoza **14**
- Villaggio **7**

RESTAURANTS
- Azafran **4**
- Grill Q **12**
- Estancia La Florencia **5**
- Francis Mallmann 1884 **17**
- Francesco **10**
- Il Panino **2**
- Mi Tierra **16**

ATTRACTIONS
- Mercado Central **9**

Choose your own pace when touring the *bodegas* (wineries); two or three visits are possible in half a day. Five would be the absolute most doable in a full day. Make a reservation for lunch either at one of the many excellent restaurants in the wine country—or, better yet, at a *bodega* itself. Some have truly outstanding restaurants (see later in this chapter). More and more wineries are now charging for tours, although if you purchase wine at the end of a tour, the entry fee is usually waived. Some are closed on Sundays. Reservations are generally required—don't count on being able to just show up at a vineyard. Another important factor is that the roads in Mendoza can be very hard to navigate, and drivers are particularly aggressive. Only the most confident should rent a car.

A journey into the magnificent mountains, however, is possible anytime, and can be easily done on your own. The best circuit is Alta Montaña, which follows parts of the old Inca trail and Andes railroad through the tall Andes to the border with Chile.

Mendoza also offers a wealth of outdoor activities, ranging from Class III, IV, and V white-water rafting in the Mendoza River to horseback riding, mountain biking, and trekking in the Andes. Tour operators in Mendoza will arrange an itinerary according to your preferences, from part-day outings to multiday excursions.

Two-and-a-half hours south of Mendoza is the province's second-largest city, San Rafael. More the size of a large town, it's a laid-back, rural place that has some great outdoor activities nearby, as well as its own share of important *bodegas,* although it has little of particular interest to foreigners.

Even farther south, Las Leñas is a world-class ski resort that is a winter playground of Porteños escaping the capital for a snowy retreat. Los Penitentes offers decent runs closer to Mendoza. For the bold and the brave, Mount Aconcagua provides an irresistible challenge, and at 6,960m (22,829 ft.) it towers above all other peaks in the Western Hemisphere. With a good bit of endurance, money, and time on your hands, the mountain can be conquered.

1 MENDOZA ★★★

710km (440 miles) NW of Buenos Aires; 721km (447 miles) SW of Córdoba

This picturesque city lies at the heart of the Cuyo, the name of the region that comprises the provinces of Mendoza, San Juan, and San Luis. It was founded in 1561 by Spanish colonialists, and retains an idyllic serenity that has carried over from centuries past.

Mendoza locals may be complaining these days about too much traffic, too much development, and too much change, as their little country *pueblo* starts looking more and more like a big city, but there is still much *tranquilidad* here. It's still Argentina's loveliest, most livable, city, with a unique vibe blending cosmopolitan shopping and dining with rural country life. An artificial oasis, Mendoza receives no more than 5 days of rain per year. A scarce commodity, water is celebrated in the trickling fountains of the city's many lovely plazas, and in the shade of the dike-supported trees that line the boulevards. Give yourself time to linger in Mendoza's cafes, plazas, and many fantastic restaurants, which bustle from noon to night.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

BY PLANE Mendoza's international airport, **Francisco Gabrielli** (✆ **261/520-6000**), lies 8km (5 miles) north of town on RN 40. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (✆ **0810/222-86527;** www.aerolineas.com.ar) offers seven daily arrivals from Buenos Aires. **LAN** (✆ **0810/999-9526;** www.lan.com) flies to Mendoza from both Buenos Aires (two times a day) and from Santiago, Chile, once in the morning and once in the evening, making a day trip from Santiago possible. Because Buenos Aires has both an international and a domestic airport (which are a minimum of 45 min. apart), it's both faster and easier to get to Mendoza in 1 day via Santiago, which has only one airport.

BY BUS The **Terminal del Sol** (✆ **261/431-3001**), or central bus station, lies just east of central Mendoza. Buses travel to Buenos Aires (12–14 hr.; $72/£49); Córdoba (12 hr.; $42/£28); Santiago, Chile (7 hr.; $38/£26); Las Leñas (7 hr.; $19/£13); and other cities throughout the region. **Chevallier** (✆ **261/431-0235;** www.nuevachevallier.com.ar), **Expreso Uspallata** (✆ **261/421-3309;** www.turismouspallata.com), and **Andesmar** (✆ **261/431-0585;** www.andesmar.com) are the main bus companies. Buses from Buenos Aires and elsewhere in Argentina generally arrive in the early morning—book an early check-in with your hotel to avoid being stranded!

BY CAR The route from Buenos Aires is a long (10 hr.) but easy drive on either the RN 7 or the RN 8. Mendoza is more easily reached by car from Santiago, Chile, along the RN 7, although the 250km (155-mile) trek through the Andes can be treacherous in winter, when chains are required. Give yourself 4 to 6 hours to make the journey from Santiago.

VISITOR INFORMATION Mendoza's **Subsecretaría Provincial de Turismo,** on Av. San Martín 1143 (✆ **261/420-2800**), is open daily from 9am to 9pm. The helpful staff will provide you with tourist information on the entire province, including maps of the wine roads and regional driving circuits. **Municipal tourist offices,** called Centros de Información, are located at Garibaldi near San Martín (✆ **261/423-8745;** daily 8am–1pm), 9 de Julio 500 (✆ **261/420-1333;** Mon–Fri 9am–9pm), and Las Heras 340 (✆ **261/429-6298;** Mon–Fri 9am–1:30pm and 3–7:30pm). They provide city maps, hotel information, and brochures of tourist activities. You will find small visitor-information booths at the airport and bus station as well. Information and permits for Aconcagua Provincial Park are available at the **Centro de Informes del Parques,** in Mendoza's

Safety in Mendoza: Not What It Used to Be

Mendoza has been the scene of some pretty intense thefts and robberies of late, and more than a few have specifically targeted the upscale inns and restaurants frequented by foreign travelers. Snatch-and-run grabs have also been reported. There is no real reason to be alarmed since few have been injured. There is little one can do except keep only small amounts of cash on you, leave your passport at your hotel, avoid walking in the city late at night, and keep an eye out for pickpockets. Most wineries and hotels now have very strict security measures mainly because the local police aren't effective.

Parque San Martín (✆ **261/420-5052**). The office is only open during the climbing season, from December through March. During the rest of the year, you must contact the **Subsecretaría Provincial de Recursos Naturales** (✆ **261/425-2090**). Permits to climb the summit cost $500 (£338), and you must go in person to obtain one. In addition, several websites offer useful tourist information: www.turismo.mendoza.gov.ar, www.aconcagua.mendoza.gov.ar, www.welcomeargentina.com/mendoza, and www.mendoza.com.ar.

GETTING AROUND You can easily explore central Mendoza on foot, although you will want to hire a driver or rent a car to visit the wine roads and tour the mountains. Taxis and *remises* (private, unmetered taxis) are inexpensive: Drivers cost no more than $15 (£10) per hour. Travelers should be wary of walking alone outside the main center of town, especially at night. Traditionally Mendoza is one of Argentina's safest cities, but it has experienced an increase in crime, part of its growing pains. Ask your hotel to call a *remise* or radio-taxi, rather than flagging down a taxi on your own. For a *remise,* try **La Veloz Del Este** (✆ **261/423-9090**) or **Mendocar** (✆ **261/423-6666**). For a taxi, call **Radiotaxi** (✆ **261/430-3300**).

If you do rent a car, parking is easy and inexpensive inside the city, with paid parking meters and private lots (called *playas*) clearly marked. Easy to navigate, the city spreads out in a clear grid pattern around Plaza Independencia. Avenida San Martín is the city's main thoroughfare, Paseo Sarmiento is the pedestrian walking street that extends from Plaza Independencia to Avenida San Martín, and Avenida Emilio Civit is the posh residential avenue leading to the entrance of Parque San Martín. Outside the city, road signs are sometimes missing or misleading, and you should pay careful attention to road maps. The main highways are Hwy. 40, which runs north-south and will take you to Maipú and Luján de Cuyo; and Hwy. 7, which runs east-west and will take you to the Alta Montaña Route.

Both **Budget** (✆ **261/425-3114;** www.budget.com) and **Hertz Annie Millet** (✆ **261/448-2327;** www.hertz.com) rent cars at Mendoza's airport. Expect to pay about $55 (£37) per day for a compact car with insurance and 200km (124 miles) included. If you reserve the car before arriving in Argentina, you can usually negotiate a similar rate, but with unlimited mileage. **AutoMendoza** ★ (✆ **261/420-0022;** www.automendoza.com), a locally run company, has flexible rates and will drop a car off wherever you need it. Rates start at $55 (£37) per day. You'll get a better deal if you pay in cash.

Mendoza's public bus system is one of the best in the country. Regular buses depart from various stops in town to the outlying wine areas. El Troli, a trolley that follows the main roads in the city, is fun and cheap, at 80¢ (55p) per ride. It's an easy way to get up to Parque San Martín and back.

Fast Facts Mendoza

Area Code The area code for the city is **261.** The country code for Argentina is **54.**

ATMs & Currency Exchange ATMs are ubiquitous in Mendoza; currency-exchange houses, however, are harder to find. Two reliable exchange houses, both at the corner of San Martín and Catamarca, are **Maguitur** (✆ **261/425-1575**) and **Cambio Santiago** (✆ **261/420-0277**). They are open Monday through Friday

from 8:30am to 1pm and from 5 to 8:30pm, and Saturday from 9:30am to 1pm. Major banks, with ATMs that have Cirrus and PLUS access, are located around the Plaza San Martín and along Avenida Sarmiento, including **Citibank,** Av. Sarmiento 20 (✆ **261/449-6519**).

Emergency For an **ambulance,** dial ✆ **107** or 261/424-8000; for **police,** dial ✆ **101** or 261/429-4444; in case of **fire,** dial ✆ **100.**

Hospital **Hospital Central** (✆ **261/420-0600**) is near the bus station at Salta and Alem.

Internet Access Internet access in most places costs a meager 2 pesos (35¢–65¢/20p–35p]) per hour. A number of cybercafes run along Avenida Sarmiento; try **WH Webhouse,** Sarmiento 219 (✆ **261/423-3398**), open daily from 8:30am to 1am. **Telefónica** and **Telecentro** offices, located all over town, also offer Internet use.

Pharmacy **Farmacia del Puente,** Av. Las Heras 201 (✆ **261/423-8800**), operates 24 hours.

Post Office The main post office, **Correo Argentino** (✆ **261/429-0848**), located at the corner of Avenida San Martín and Colón, is open weekdays from 8am to 8pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Mendoza has many new hotels opening, from new five-star chains, such as Sheraton and Diplomatico, to apart-hotels. For those wanting to stay longer than a few nights, you best bet will be out of town in Chacras de Coria (see later in this chapter). I recommend spending a few nights in town, and then staying at a rural inn amid the vineyards, for a change of pace (see "Touring the Wineries," later in this chapter). More and more *bodegas* are opening up guesthouses, where relaxation and wine are the top draws. Prices quoted are for high season, which in Mendoza is November through March and July. Hotel rates are often discounted 15% to 20% in the off season. Prices listed below do not include the 21% tax.

Very Expensive

Park Hyatt Mendoza ★★ Peering majestically over the Plaza de la Independencia, the Park Hyatt is in the restored 19th-century Plaza Hotel and includes a modern seven-floor tower of guest rooms out back. It's still, without a doubt, the premier place to stay in town. Sweeping columns of granite and stone showcase the lobby, and an impressive collection of Mendocino art pays tribute to local culture. There's a warm, inviting pool and a casual wine bar in the interior outdoor patio. Guest rooms, in general, are spacious and contemporary, and the huge white-marble bathrooms are the real stars. The exquisite spa incorporates Mendocino wines in a variety of treatments. A well-equipped fitness room, Jacuzzi, sauna, and steam bath are here, too. Serving as a cultural heart of Mendoza, the hotel hosts frequent events, ranging from jazz and music shows to wine fairs and flamenco dances. The breakfast buffet is no longer included in rates. Watch out for overpriced extras such as minibar drinks and Internet connections. Next door, the Regency Casino is Mendoza's nod to Las Vegas. Be sure to check the hotel website for Internet-only rates with a 10% discount, and request a nonsmoking room if you don't smoke.

Chile 1124 (Sarmiento and Espejo), 5500 Mendoza. ✆ **261/441-1234.** Fax 261/441-1235. www.mendoza.park.hyatt.com. 186 units. $250 (£138) double; from $350 (£193) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; wine bar; heated outdoor pool; health club; spa; Jacuzzi; sauna; steam bath; concierge; business center; room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Sheraton Mendoza Definitely the new kid on the block—albeit one with a famous name—this high-rise hotel, which opened in 2008, is the tallest building in the entire city. Inside, it's a straight-up five-star convention center and hotel, with nary a nod to the fabulous surroundings, local flair for design, or the wine/food vibe so important to Mendoza. Still, rooms are incredibly comfortable, as to be expected from a Sheraton. And the rooftop lounge has unbeatable views of the city, not to mention a great wine list. There's also a casino attached. Be sure to request a mountain view, even if they won't confirm it (and it's worth double-checking at check-in). Business travelers and bigger groups will be most interested in this option. For a real feel of life in Mendoza, choose another option.

Primitivo de la Reta 989 (at the corner of Amigorena), 5500 Mendoza. ✆ **261/441-5500.** www.sheraton.com/mendoza. 180 units. AE, DC, MC, V. $230 (£155) standard double; $270 (£182) club-level double; from $370 (£250) suites. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; heated indoor pool; fitness center; concierge; business center; room service; babysitting; laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Expensive

El Portal Suites (Kids) These comfortable suites have a clean and modern style. They can sleep from two to five people in a variety of bed setups, and offer a sense of freedom to travelers who want to make themselves at home. They're an especially good option for families. The staff is friendly and helpful, and will deliver local newspapers to your door each morning. Ask for one of the Grand Suites overlooking the Plaza de Chile. These have Jacuzzis, a large patio, and room for up to five people. Bathrooms are large, while kitchenettes range in size. Upstairs, a terrace with an outdoor Jacuzzi offers glorious views, as well as a small gym and a deck for relaxing.

Necochea 661 (Peru and 25 de Mayo), 5500 Mendoza. ✆/fax **261/438-2038.** www.elportalsuites.com.ar. 26 units. AE, DC, MC, V. $105 (£71) double; $145 (£98) triple; $170 (£115) grand suite (sleeps 4–5). Rates include breakfast and parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; exercise room; outdoor Jacuzzi; business center; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, kitchenette, hair dryer, safe.

Moderate

Deptos Mendoza (Finds) This sleek new building of steel and brick offers plenty of great value. ("Depto" is short for *departamento,* which is Spanish for "apartment.") Rent a funky studio and slip into a hip and urban way of life; it seems that easy here. On the top floor of this downtown building is the reception desk, which also acts as a lively gallery. The apartments are decorated with local art, with a focus on function and lighting. Ceramic tiles, aluminum, concrete, and wood dominate the look. Bathrooms are quite small, with stand-up showers only. Apartment no. 9 is the largest, with a big, sunny terrace, but the street below is quite noisy at night. If you're coming with a group of friends and you love design, this is a great choice. Parking is available nearby for an extra fee of $8 (£5.40) per day.

Leandro N. Alem 41, 5500 Mendoza. ✆ **261/429-9222.** www.deptosmendoza.com.ar. 12 units. $65–$99 (£44–£67) apt. No credit cards. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, kitchenette.

Hotel Argentino Value Located cater-corner from the lavish Park Hyatt (p. 267) and overlooking the Plaza de la Independencia, this hotel is a good value in an excellent location. The Argentino offers midlevel elegance and comfort at affordable rates. Forty-four small, standard rooms have recently been upgraded; all are furnished with light-wood and black-wood writing desks and chairs, satiny bed covers, and small but sparkling marble bathrooms with showers only. The executive rooms are also newly refreshed. There's also an airy restaurant and an adjacent bar in the bright and expansive lobby. The business center offers free Internet and Wi-Fi access for hotel guests. If you're traveling alone, be sure to ask about their single rates at about 10% off the regular rates. Rates here include all taxes, making this even more of a bargain.

Espejo 455 (at Chile), 5500 Mendoza. ✆ **261/405-6300.** www.argentino-hotel.com. 46 units. $75 (£51) standard double; $90 (£61) triple; executive double $82 (£55). Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; lounge; small outdoor pool; business center; room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Hotel Villaggio The jury is still out on whether this classy new hotel downtown will stand the test of time (a jerky elevator does not bode well). But rooms are clean, modern, and bright, with dark woods, cream-colored linens, and double-panel windows to keep out the noisy street. It's just a few steps from Plaza Independencia. Upstairs there's a Jacuzzi, small gym, and sauna. The breakfasts are hearty. The hotel promotes itself as "boutique" and I'd say it's too corporate for that label. Still, service is genuinely friendly and the price is good. This isn't the kind of hotel you want to laze around in. But it's a good central bet for those on the go.

25 de Mayo 1010, 5500 Mendoza. ✆ **261/524-5200.** www.hotelvillaggio.com.ar. 26 rooms. $125 (£84) standard doubles; $140 (£95) double superior. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Lounge; spa; small gym; business center. *In room:* A/C, Wi-Fi, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Inexpensive

Bohemia Hotel Boutique There's just enough funkiness and fabulousness to this new B&B to take it out of the hostel category and into the boutique hotel one. It's in the quiet and upscale "Quinta" neighborhood between downtown and the Parque San Martín. Rooms are small, and decorated in an Art Nouveau style. The quietest and most spacious room is next to the pool. Staff are helpful, friendly, and will even cook you dinner upon request! They charge extra for paying with a credit card.

Granaderos 954 (at Julio A Roca and Martin Zapata), 5500 Mendoza. ✆ **261/423-0575.** www.bohemiahotelboutique.com. 9 units. $110 (£74) double. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Pool; lounge; concierge; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, Wi-Fi, hair dryer.

Damajuana Hostel Value Like a five-star resort at rock-bottom prices, this hostel is located in the heart of the happening Arístides district, in a renovated old family home. It has a huge pool, garden, and barbecue in the backyard, friendly staff and information desk, and a funky bar. It's popular with young travelers and backpackers, and there's always something going on here. Quiet, peaceful sleeps are not guaranteed! Private double rooms are also available for guests who don't feel up to sharing.

Aristides Villanueva 282 (at Olascoaga and Rodríguez), 5500 Mendoza. ✆ **261/425-5858.** www.damajuanahostel.com.ar. 8 units, all with shared bathrooms. $18 (£12) per person in dorm; $50 (£34) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Bar; outdoor pool; laundry; high-speed Internet.

Tips Take Flight

If you're visiting Mendoza and want to sample as much wine from as many wineries as possible, then take a flight! A flight of wines, that is. The **Vines of Mendoza,** Espejo 567 (✆ **261/438-1031**), was the first collective tasting room in the region. Led by charming and bilingual wine experts, tastings include daily samples of some of Argentina's finest—and hardest to find—boutique wines. On Wednesday nights, a local winemaker presents his best *vino tinto,* and on Fridays, it's about bubbly champagne. The indoor terrace is cozy. They've just opened shop inside the Park Hyatt Hotel. Likewise, **Wine Club Republic** (✆ **261/15-541-3892** [cell]), meets every Monday at 7pm at the Marcelino Wine Store, at the corner of Benegas and Zapata. It's open to the public, but reservations are required. Both are great places to meet and mingle with expats, other travelers, and local wine lovers.

Plaza Italia B and B This tiny spot inside a traditional Mendoza family's home has been getting rave reviews for its warm hospitality. The owners love to chat with foreigners. All rooms have air-conditioning and private bathrooms, although one room's bathroom is not en suite. The room inside a renovated garage is the most modern, although it fronts on a busy street. Still, the location is superb, the service very sociable, and the price remains a bargain.

Montevidea 685 (at Peru and 25 de Mayo), 5500 Mendoza. ✆ **261/423-4219.** www.plazaitalia.net. 5 units. $110 (£74) double. No credit cards. Rates include breakfast. **Amenities:** Concierge; laundry service. *In room:* A/C.

WHERE TO DINE

Mendoza is Argentina's top destination for food lovers. Restaurants here are known around the world, and the food—fresh, local, creative, and very tasty—will certainly be a highlight of your trip. As in the rest of Argentina, Mendocinos dine late. Breakfasts of coffee and pastries are served from around 7:30 to 10:30am. Lunch is generally a leisurely meal, running from 1 to 3pm. Restaurants don't usually open for dinner until 8:30pm, and they don't get busy until 10pm. How can you survive? If you must dine before 9pm, stick to hotel-lobby restaurants, which usually open earlier. Or, do as the locals do: Indulge in an afternoon siesta, then satiate your 6pm hunger with a coffee and snack at one of the city's many lovely outdoor cafes. We highly recommend that you soak up the atmosphere at a Mendoza cafe. There are dozens of cafes with outdoor patios along the Sarmiento Peatonal pedestrian street, where the people-watching is world-class. At Arístides Villanueva 209, try **La Dulcería de la Abuela** (✆ **261/423-5885**) for delicious sweets. For something funky, **Kato Café** ★, Emilio Civit 556 (✆ **261/425-7000**), is artsy and hip. And for the classically elegant Mendocino cafe, nothing comes close to **Vía Civit** ★, Emilio Civit 277 (✆ **261/429-8529**). That can be followed by a stroll through the plazas and maybe a stop at a wine bar. Come 9:30 or 10pm, you'll be ready to head out for dinner.

Even if you are staying in the center of town, make at least one trip out to a restaurant in the suburb of Godoy Cruz or in the wine areas (see "Touring the Wineries," later in this chapter), where some of the best cuisine is to be had at restaurants such as **La Bourgogne** (p. 284) and **Terruños** (p. 287).

Expensive

1884 ★★★ INTERNATIONAL Some people come to Mendoza just to eat at celebrity chef–philosopher–food guru Francis Mallmann's restaurant, inside the Romanesque Bodega Escorihuela—known, among other things, for housing the biggest wine barrel in the province. With fine Argentine meats and fresh local produce, his carefully presented cuisine combines his Patagonian roots with his French culinary training. Local go-tos, such as *lechón* (young pork) and *chivito* (baby goat), are classics, and the huge outdoor wooden stove produces an incredible salted chicken. This is simple food prepared in a rustic, stripped-down style typical for Mallmann. Dishes are prepared with matching local wine selections, with Malbec and Syrah topping the list. In the summer, request a coveted garden table. For dessert, the *chocolate fanático* will blow your hat off. You can easily combine in the same visit a meal here with a tour of the *bodega,* which also has an art gallery. Tours are offered weekdays every hour from 9:30am to 3:30pm. As of press time, 1884 is now only open for dinner.

Belgrano 1188, Godoy Cruz (at Presidente Alvear). ✆ **261/424-2698.** Reservations highly recommended. Main courses $19–$37 (£13–£25). AE, MC, V. Daily 8:30pm–midnight.

Francesco Ristorante ★ ITALIAN Mendoza is populated by Italians, and there are many fine Italian restaurants in town. Francesco, though, is the most elegant and classy. In the kitchen, María Theresa oversees a menu that has impressed for decades. The meat and homemade pasta dishes are equally excellent. The option of combining three stuffed pastas lets you try some of the highlights. Don't miss the tiramisu for dessert. Service is seriously professional here, including a doting sommelier. The outdoor garden is romantic and lovely on a summer's evening.

Chile 1268 (at Espejo and Gutiérrez), Mendoza. ✆ **261/425-3912.** www.francescoristorante.com.ar. Reservations recommended. Main courses $10–$18 (£6.80–£12). AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30pm–12:30am.

Grill Q ★ PARRILLA At last, a sophisticated and upscale *parrilla* in downtown Mendoza that showcases the finest of traditional Argentine cuisine. Recently opened inside the Park Hyatt hotel, Grill Q has a purely regional menu, from classic cuts of beef (tenderloin, rib-eye, skirt, flank, or rump steaks) to local specialties such as *locro* stew and empanadas. Start with a matambre beef roll, then choose a cut of beef, pick a side dish (simple salad or grilled vegetables), and get your knife ready. It's a crisp, bright room, with wooden ceilings and chairs, and a patio that's in the hotel's outdoor atrium. Next door is the snazzy new the Vines Wine Bar and Vinoteca, meaning the wine list at Q is one of the best in the country.

Park Hyatt Hotel, Chile 112 (at Sarmiento and Espejo). ✆ **261/441-1234.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$19 (£8.20–£13). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 12:30–3:30pm and 8pm–midnight.

Moderate

Azafrán ★★ Finds INTERNATIONAL This charming restaurant, named after the highly prized and rare saffron spice, is set behind an attractively decorated all-wood wine store/cellar. Needless to say, wines are big here, and they have more than 300 different labels for you to choose from. Before you peruse the menu, step into the cellar to discuss your tastes with the friendly on-site sommelier, who'll encourage you to match your food to your wine (not the other way around). Regardless, the food is imaginative, fresh, relaxed, and eclectic. You may start with the house specialty—a platter of smoked meats and cheeses. For entrees, the rabbit ravioli in champagne sauce is delicate and unusual, and the vegetables and tofu baked in a puff pastry will please any vegetarian. Even the steak here is served with a twist—in this case, with sweet potato puréed in a light cream

Tips The Real Scoop

Mendocinos love ice cream, and they have some of the best in a country passionate for the stuff. There are *heladerías* on most every street. The best in town is **Helados Ferruccio Soppelsa** (✆ **261/422-9000**), run by a family of immigrants from the Italian Dolomites. The classics are *dulce de leche*, tiramisu, and strawberry and cream. And check out the *vino*-inspired flavors such as pineapple with Voignier, vanilla with Malbec, and peach with Syrah. They have more than a dozen locations in the Mendoza area, but it's fun to join the local families who gather in the evening at the busy shop on the corner of Belgrano and Sarmiento/Civit. There's also one on the northwest corner of the Plaza Independencia, another at the Palmares Mall, and a new one in Chacras de Coria's main square.

sauce. Given how busy this place almost always is, the service is convivial, and the wood tables and vintage checkered floors give you a sense of dining in an old farmhouse. In warm months, there are a few lovely tables on the sidewalk for alfresco dining.

Sarmiento 765 (at Belgrano and Perú). ✆ **261/429-4200.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $4–$7 (£2.70–£4.75). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 12:30–4pm and 8pm–1am.

Mi Tierra Moments ARGENTINE If, for some unfortunate reason, you don't have time to tour any vineyards in Mendoza, a meal at Mi Tierra will come pretty close to replicating the *bodega* experience. Tucked inside an old downtown house, each room of this "thematic restaurant" presents the wines of a different local vineyard, including two local heavyweights, Catena Zapata and Chandon, showcasing the vintages, style, and history. You really feel like you've been whisked out to Maipú for dinner. The menu offers rustic local specialties such as goat, young pork, wild boar, and rabbit. The pastas are excellent. For dessert, try the chardonnay parfait. Wines are offered in a flight, another bonus. Although it's a bit touristy and the food isn't out of the ordinary, the intentions are good, and the building itself is delightful.

Mitre 794 (corner of San Lorenzo), Mendoza. ✆ **261/425-0035.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $15–$24 (£10–£16). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–3:30pm and 8:30pm–12:30am.

Inexpensive

Estancia La Florencia Value ARGENTINE This casual family eatery pays homage to the legendary gaucho, and its two levels mimic a traditional *estancia*. Ask one of the waiters, not one of whom is under 50, for a recommended plate, and he will likely tell you, *"Una comida sin carne no es comida"* (a meal without meat isn't a meal). So choose one of the many varieties of steaks, the *lomo* being the most tender; or order a half-grilled chicken served with a lemon slice. Just remember that a plate of meat is a plate of meat, uncorrupted by green vegetables or anything but potatoes (usually fries). Other accouterments must be ordered separately. Food is served promptly and without fanfare.

Sarmiento 698 and Perú. ✆ **261/429-3008.** Main courses $10–$18 (£6.80–£12). AE, MC, V. Mon–Wed noon–5pm and 8pm–2am; Thurs–Sun noon–2am.

Il Panino Value PIZZA After digging hard to find the best pizza in Mendoza, where you will find great pizza on every block, I landed at this part restaurant, part enormous home for what proved to be the perfect meal: The perfectly thin-crusted pizzas are lightly baked, with an emphasis on local fresh ingredients on top—including goat cheese, arugula, fresh herbs, and olives. Look for options such as hearts of palm, asparagus, and sun-dried tomatoes. They've got the right blend of freshness and oozing flavors. They also have wonderful empanadas and Italian sandwiches—and plans to open at lunchtime. It's a bit out of the way, a dozen blocks or so from the center of town.

Paso de los Andes 147–153. ✆ **261/428-5922.** Main courses $6–$12 (£4.05–£8.20). AE, MC, V. Daily 7pm–1am.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Mercado Central ★ If you've come to Mendoza to explore food and wine, don't miss the place where locals shop for it. El Mercado Central, the central market, has been in the same location on busy Las Heras street for 120 years and has plenty of atmosphere and lively characters. Stalls offer up fresh produce, and the butchers are the real deal. It's a great place for people-watching. You can also grab quick, cheap snacks such as empanadas, pizzas, and sandwiches, and the ingredients for a great picnic.

Corner of Av. Las Heras and Patricias Mendocinas. No phone. Free admission. Mon–Sat 8am–1pm and 4–7pm.

Museo Fundacional ★★ This museum, 3km (1¾ miles) from downtown, displays what remains of the old city, which was ravaged by an 1861 earthquake. Chronicling the early history of Mendoza, the museum begins by looking at the culture of the indigenous Huarpes and continues with an examination of the city's development through Spanish colonization to independence. An underground chamber holds the ruins of the aqueduct and fountain that once provided Mendoza's water supply. Near the museum, the **Ruinas de San Francisco** represent a Jesuit church and school that were used until the Jesuits were expelled from the continent in 1767 and later occupied by the Franciscan Order.

Videla Castillo, btw. Beltrán and Alberdi. ✆ **261/425-6927.** Admission 75¢ (50p). Tues–Sat 8am–8pm; Sun 3–8pm.

Museo Histórico General San Martín ★ Adjacent to the "Alameda," a beautiful promenade under white poplars, the San Martín Library and Museum stands in the spot where General San Martín—the legendary liberator who freed Argentina, Chile, and Peru from Spain—had hoped to make his home. The museum's small collection of artifacts pays homage to Argentina's beloved hero, who prepared his liberation campaigns from Mendoza.

Remedios Escalada de San Martín 1843. ✆ **261/428-7947.** Admission 75¢ (50p). Mon–Fri 9:30am–5:30pm; Sat 9:30am–1:30pm.

Parque General San Martín ★★★ Almost as big as the city itself, this wonderful park, designed in 1896 by Carlos Thays (who also designed the Palermo parks in Buenos Aires), extends over 350 hectares (865 acres) with 17km (11 miles) of idyllic pathways and 300 species of plants and trees. A tourist office, near the park's main entrance, provides information on all park activities, which include walking, jogging, bicycling, boating, horseback riding (outside the park's perimeters), and hang gliding. The stunning entrance gates were originally made for the Turkish Sultan Hamid II but ended up as a gift to Mendoza from England. Don't miss the rose garden, the Islas Malvinas soccer stadium (which was built for the 1978 soccer World Cup), or the hustle and bustle at the

Club de Regattas. There's even a golf course (see below). The best hike leads to the top of Cerro de la Gloria, which, at 960m (3,149 ft.) above sea level, offers a panoramic view of the city and surrounding valley, as well as a bronze monument to the men who liberated Argentina, Chile, and Peru. You can hang glide from the top of the other hill, Cerro Arco.

Main entrance at Av. Emilio Civit and Bologne sur Mer. Free admission. Daily 24 hr.

Plaza Independencia ★★ The plaza marks the city center, a beautiful square with pergolas, fountains, frequent artisan fairs, and cultural events. Following the 1861 earthquake, the new city was rebuilt around this area. From Tuesday through Sunday, an extensive craft fair gets going about 4pm. On weekend evenings free live concerts and puppet shows take place here. Four additional plazas—San Martín, Chile, Italia, and España—are located 2 blocks off each corner of Independence Square. Each has its own charms, and they're all worth getting to know. Surrounding the square you will find the Julio Quintanilla Theater, the National School, the Independencia Theater, the Provincial Legislature, the Park Hyatt Hotel, and the small Modern Art Museum. During the annual Vendimia Wine Harvest Festival, all major events are staged here.

Squared in by Patricias Mendocinas, Espejo, Chile, and Rivadavia, and intersected by Av. Mitre y Sarmiento. Modern Art Museum: Underground level of plaza. ✆ **261/425-7279.** Free admission. Mon–Sat 9am–1pm and 4–9pm; Sun 5–9pm.

TOUR OPERATORS & OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Turismo Uspallata, Las Heras 699 (✆ **261/438-1092;** www.turismouspallata.com), runs trips to rural *estancias* and sells bus transfers to all the surrounding areas, including San Rafael and Valle de Uco.

Art lovers can spend the day with local art guide **Cecilia Romera** (✆ **261/15-541-88800;** www.mendozaarttours.com.ar), who has an insider's access to the top galleries, workshops, studios, and unique exhibits. It's a chance to meet artists face to face, and to explore a blossoming visual arts culture. Customized tours run between $30 and $50 (£20–£34), depending on length.

GOLF There are three golf courses in the Mendoza area and a few more in the outskirts. The **Club de Campo,** considered the best, has great views of the Andes and opens to the public from Tuesday through Friday. Fees are a bargain at $18 (£9.90) for 18 holes. Club Andino is a course in the middle of the Parque San Martín.

HIKING Serious hikers will want to head into the hills with a private local mountain guide like **Pedro Rossell** from Discover the Andes Expeditions (✆ **261/424-5142;** www.discovertheandes.com). Two-hour treks offered by **Argentina Rafting Expediciones,** Primitivo de la Reta 992, Office 4 (✆ **261/429-6325**), extend from Potrerillos to the waterfall at la Quebrada del Salto, where rappelling is possible. The 2-hour trek costs $25 (£17), including transfer from Mendoza, which adds another 2 to 3 hours to the outing. A full-day hike, with transfer and lunch included, is $40 (£27).

HORSEBACK RIDING For those looking to release their inner gaucho, **Cabalgata Mendoza** (✆ **261/15-536-2033** [cell]; www.cabalgatamendoza.com.ar) specializes in trips from 2 hours to a 12-day crossing of the Andes. **Argentina Rafting Expediciones** (see above) and **Ríos Andinos,** RN 7, Km 64, 5549 Potrerillos (✆ **261/431-6074**), offer 2-hour horseback rides ($23/£16) and full-day rides ($40/£27) from their bases on Potrerillos.

MOUNTAIN BIKING In February, cyclists from around the world participate in **La Vuelta Ciclista de Mendoza,** a mini Andean Tour de France, around Mendoza province. **Argentina Rafting Expediciones** (see above) runs 2-hour mountain-bike adventures in the rugged Potrerillos area for $25 (£17) and full-day rides for $35 (£24).

SKIING Perhaps the best place to ski, not just in Argentina but also in South America, is **Las Leñas** (see "Hitting the Slopes in Las Leñas," later in this chapter). Closer to Mendoza, the small resort of **Los Penitentes** (see "The Alta Montaña Driving Circuit," later in this chapter) offers 23 downhill slopes as well as cross-country skiing. **Portillo** is a much larger and better-equipped ski resort just on the other side of the Chilean border. Eighty kilometers (50 miles) south, **Vallecitos** is the smallest and closest ski resort to Mendoza, but it can be difficult to reach in heavy snow conditions. Obtain information on the province's ski areas from Mendoza's **Subsecretaría Provincial de Turismo** (see "Essentials," earlier in this chapter).

WHITE-WATER RAFTING ★ Mendoza affords some of the best white-water rafting in Argentina. During the summer months, when the snow melts in the Andes and fills the Mendoza River, rafters enjoy up to Class IV and V rapids. Rafting is possible year-round, but the river is colder and calmer in winter months. Potrerillos, 53km (33 miles) west of Mendoza, has two professional tour operators offering half-day, whole-day, and 2-day trips on the Mendoza River, including direct transfers from Mendoza. These are **Argentina Rafting Expediciones** (see above) and **Ríos Andinos** (see above). Be sure to bring an extra pair of clothes and a towel because you are guaranteed to get soaked. Children 11 and under are not allowed to raft. Argentina Rafting has a small restaurant and bar where you can eat and defrost after soaking in the river. Rafting starts at $35 (£24) for 1 hour, and both agencies also offer kayaking ($100/£68 for a full-day kayaking course), horseback riding, trekking, and mountain biking. Farther south in San Rafael (see "San Rafael," later in this chapter), there is Class II/III rafting on the Atuel River and perhaps the most extreme rafting in all of Argentina on the wild Río Diamante.

SHOPPING

On Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, an outdoor **handicrafts market** takes place during the day on Plaza Independencia, as do smaller fairs in Plaza España and along Calle Mitre. Thursday through Saturday, don't miss the excellent outdoor **antiques market** held in Plaza Pellegrini. Regional shops selling handicrafts, leather goods, gaucho paraphernalia, and *mate* tea gourds line Avenida Las Heras. Two of the best are **Las Viñas,** Av. Las Heras 399 (✆ 261/425-1520), and **Los Andes,** Av. Las Heras 445 (✆ 261/425-6688). A classier version of the Argentine souvenir shop is **Raíces,** España 1092 (✆ 261/425-4118). For high-quality leather, visit **Alain de France,** Andrade 101 (✆ 261/428-5065), or **CuerPiel,** Rioja 601 (✆ 261/423-7405). More mainstream upscale chain stores line Avenida Rivadavia, and Calle Arístides Villanueva is home to expensive fashion boutiques. The city's best shopping mall is **Palmares Open Mall,** on Ruta Panamericana 2650 in Godoy Cruz (✆ 261/413-9100). Most shops close from 1 to 5pm each day for siesta. You can also buy Mendocine wines at many shops. The least expensive cost a few dollars a bottle, and premiums go for $25 to $80 (£17–£54). Some of the best wine boutiques in town include **Pura Cepa,** Sarmiento 644 (✆ 261/423-8282), the stunning new **Winery ★**, Calle Chile 898 (✆ 261/420-2840), and **Sol y Vino,** Sarmiento 664 (✆ 261/425-6005).

Mendoza nightlife is substantially more subdued than Buenos Aires or Córdoba after hours, but a fair selection of bars and nightclubs will capture the attention of night owls. Thursday through Sunday are the biggest nights, when people get started around midnight. It's not San Telmo, but there are also some great spots to take in tango. On weekend evenings, locals gather at Plaza Pellegrini for a totally authentic, natural tango dancing session, which is not to be missed. Also check out the *milonga* shows at **Teatro Las Sillas,** San Juan 1436 (✆ **261/429-7742**). There are a few tango bars in Mendoza, three of which are **Café Soul,** San Juan 456 (✆ **261/425-7489**), **C'Gastón,** Lavalle 35 (✆ **261/423-0986**), and **Abril Café,** Las Heras 346 (✆ **261/420-4224**).

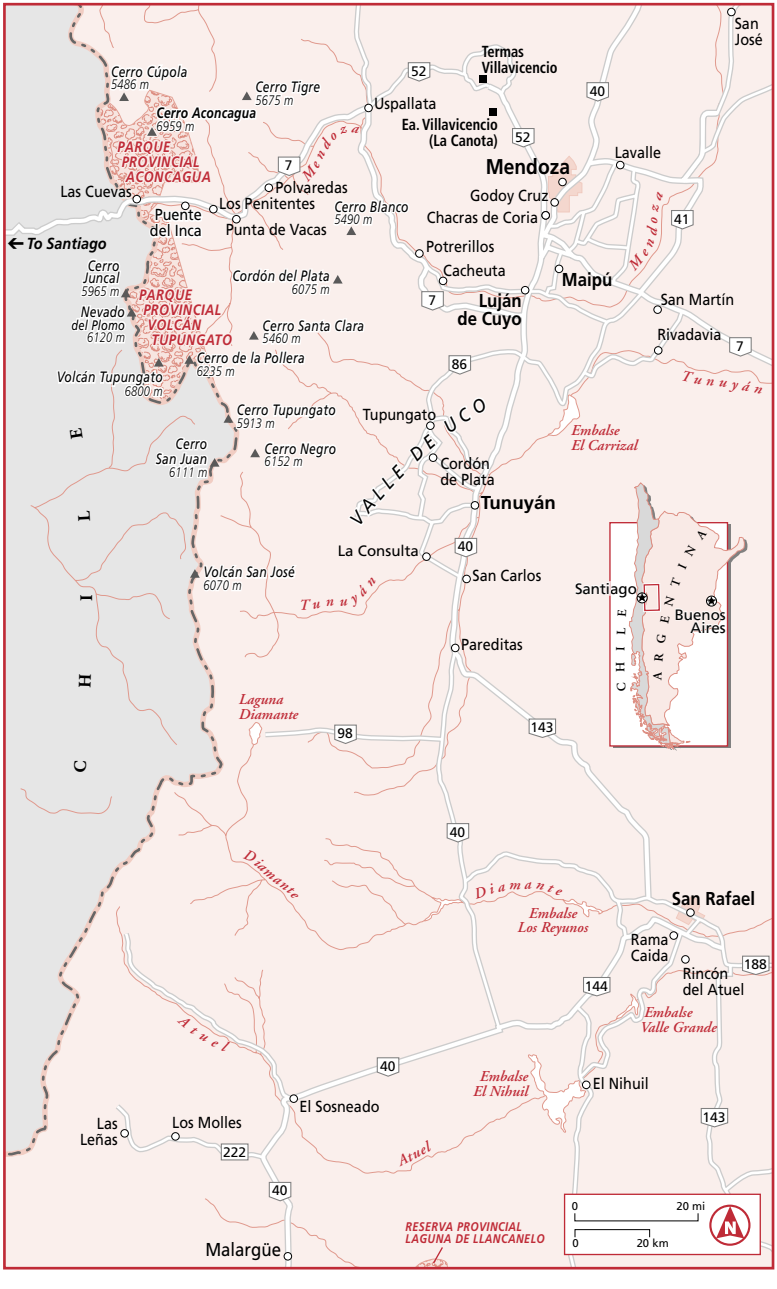
Start the night at a local wine bar such as the **Vines of Mendoza** (see earlier in this chapter) or at a cafe such as **Kato Café,** Emilio Civit 556 (✆ **261/425-7000**). The Park Hyatt Mendoza's **Bar Uvas,** Chile 1124 (✆ **261/441-1234**), begins a bit earlier and offers a complete selection of Mendocine wines, a long list of cocktails, and live jazz and bossa nova groups playing most nights.

The city's best bars line Aristides Villanueva street in the center of town. Try **Lupulo,** A. Villanueva 471 (✆ **261/15-454-0960** [cell]), for microbrewed beers; **Por Acá,** A. Villanueva 557 (no phone), for pizza and microbrewed beers; or **El Abasto,** A. Villanueva 308 (✆ **261/483-4232**), for good old rock 'n' roll. Most of the serious nightclubs and discos are 10km (6¼ miles) out of town along Ruta Panamericana near Chacras de Coria. **Cacano,** on Aguinaga 1120 (✆ **261/496-2018**), is a classic. **La Cubana,** on Panamericano Highway (no phone), is another top disco in this area. Locals flock to **La Reserva,** Rivadavia 32 (✆ **261/420-3531**), on weekend nights for the drag show at midnight. The **Blah Blah Bar,** Paseo Peatonal Alameda, Escalada 2301 Maipú (✆ **261/429-7253**), is great for a late-night drink if you're not heading out to the discos. Hip nightclubs do swap places quickly as the hot spot of the moment, and many have unpublished phone numbers. Also, most don't get going until after 1am.

For you gamblers, the **Regency Casino** at the Park Hyatt, Chile 1124 (✆ **261/441-1234**), is substantially better than the Casino Provincial, offering blackjack, roulette, poker, and slots. Table bets are $1 to $50 (70p–£34).

2 TOURING THE WINERIES ★★★

Traditional and rapidly modernizing in the same breath, Mendoza's wineries have embraced tourism over the past few years. Many now have English-speaking guides and extensive barrel tastings, and have begun to charge for visits. They are generally easily accessible along wine roads, known locally as *Los Caminos del Vino.* These roads are as enticing as the wine itself, weaving and winding through tunnels of trees to vast dry valleys dominated by breathtaking views of the snowcapped Andes. Some roads climb as high as 1,524m (4,999 ft.) in the High Zone surrounding the Mendoza River, while others lead to lower-level vineyards in the south. Mendoza's wine region is divided into four zones: the High Zone, Mendoza South, Uco Valley, and Mendoza East. We cover the first three: Mendoza East is mostly large industrial vineyards that make Argentine "table wine" (low in both quality and price) and aren't set up for tourists. To the south, San Rafael is a somewhat distant and off-the-beaten track fourth area covered here (see "San Rafael," later in this chapter). Be sure to pick up the essential collection of maps, "Caminos del Vino." At $8 (£5.40), they're the best investment you'll make in Mendoza.


San José
Termas Villavicencio
Cerro Cúpola 5486 m
Cerro Tigre 5675 m
Uspallata
Ea. Villavicencio (La Canota)
Cerro Aconcagua 6959 m
PARQUE PROVINCIAL ACONCAGUA
Mendoza
Lavalle
Las Cuevas
Polvaredas
Godoy Cruz
Los Penitentes
Cerro Blanco 5490 m
Chacras de Coria
Puente del Inca
Punta de Vacas
To Santiago
Potrerillos
Cacheuta
Cerro Juncal 5965 m
Cordón del Plata 6075 m
Maipú
Luján de Cuyo
San Martín
Rivadavia
PARQUE PROVINCIAL VOLCÁN TUPUNGATO
Nevado del Plomo 6120 m
Cerro Santa Clara 5460 m
Cerro de la Pollera 6235 m
Volcán Tupungato 6800 m
Tunuyán
Cerro Tupungato 5913 m
Tupungato
Embalse El Carrizal
Cerro San Juan 6111 m
Cerro Negro 6152 m
VALLE DE UCO
Cordón de Plata
Tunuyán
La Consulta
Volcán San José 6070 m
San Carlos
Santiago
Buenos Aires
CHILE
ARGENTINA
Tunuyán
Pareditas
Laguna Diamante
Diamante
Diamante
Embalse Los Reyunos
San Rafael
Rama Caida
Rincón del Atuel
Embalse Valle Grande
Atuel
Embalse El Nihuil
El Nihuil
El Sosneado
Las Leñas
Los Molles
Atuel
RESERVA PROVINCIAL LAGUNA DE LLANCANELO
Malargüe
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N

Tips Taking Wine Home

Argentine wines are becoming more and more popular in North America and Europe, but you won't find many of the best vintages at home yet. Here are some tips for bringing a few bottles home with you.

- Although Customs rules depend on your home country, in general you can take as many bottles back as you can carry, provided they are for personal use. Legally, you are usually allowed to bring three bottles duty-free, but if you bring more (say, up to six), just declare them at Customs. If the charge isn't waived completely, it's usually small, based either on the alcohol-per-liter ratio or on the price of the bottle. More than six bottles and you're likely to be paying a visit to Customs officers, who will tax you.
- Exporting more than a dozen bottles is more complicated. You should discuss the logistics thoroughly with authorities in your country before your trip.
- Due to recent changes in airline security, you need to limit the amount of liquid you take with you as a carry-on. Therefore, I recommend you put the wine bottles in your checked luggage, keeping weight limits in mind. Pack them well! You can buy wine bags and Styrofoam spacers from wine stores in Mendoza. Try **Pura Cepa,** Sarmiento 644 (✆ **261/423-8282**), or **Marcelino,** at the corner of Zapata y Benegas (✆ **261/429-3648**). They run about $15 (£10) each. Many *bodegas* will also help you package special bottles for international travel, and they can help arrange for larger purchases as well. The best option is to buy special boxes with foam hollows for 6 or 12 bottles. These boxes come with handles for comfortable traveling.
- Another option is to send bottles directly home via a courier service. Ask at the *bodega* or wine store for more information. It runs about $15 (£10) a bottle.
- Know that your home state or province determines the regulations you must follow. To be 100% certain you're not treading into dark waters, consult local authorities before your trip.

They're available at most hotels and at the wine shops in Mendoza. The mapmaker's new website, www.caminosdelvino.com, is an excellent place to get a head start on your planning.

HOW TO SEE THE VINEYARDS

The list of vineyards is enormous, the road maps unfamiliar, and the options endless. How exactly should you plan to make the most of your time in Mendoza? You have choices. First, you can sign up for a fully organized multiday trip led by a local guide, who takes care of all the logistics and leads you into the heart of the wine land. (See below for details on guides.) This is the easiest way to do it. You can also just join an organized tour for a day or two. Going on your own is another option. You can hire a *remise* for the day (see earlier in this chapter), call in advance to book your reservations, and head out.

Tips Make the Most of Your Bodega Day!

- Schedule three or four *bodegas* to visit per day at the most. Select a variety of sizes (large, medium, small) and styles (modern, traditional, boutique). Stop for lunch at the middle *bodega* or at a restaurant in the wine areas (see below).
- Rest well the night before you hit the *bodegas*. Tours provide plenty of information and sampling, and you will want to be alert enough to soak it all in.
- The sun is hot in Mendoza, and weather can be dry, given the high altitude. The wineries and cellars can be chilly, however, so bring a sweater, even if it's hot outside.
- Hire a *remise* driver or guide for most days, but treat yourself to 1 day spent roaming the vineyards on bicycle. You will be forced to go at a slower pace and to ride the back roads of the rolling countryside.
- Don't wear perfume or lipstick, which distract from the aroma of the wines.
- Note that many bodegas accept only cash for wine purchases, particularly those that do not have on-site restaurants. Be sure to stop by an ATM before heading out.

Renting a car is another alternative, but beware of drinking and driving! Finally, renting a bike gives the day a leisurely pace, but be wary of Mendocino drivers!

Practically all local *bodegas* now open their doors to tourists; some even offer guest rooms—a fabulous trend that is definitely on the rise. If you fall in love with a particular vineyard, ask if they have guest rooms and see if you can stay the night. What makes a good *bodega* tour is a bilingual, educated, and charming guide, and an opportunity to taste some of their best wines at the end.

The **High Zone** ★★★ that surrounds the Mendoza River includes Luján de Cuyo and Maipú. This first zone is best regarded for its production of Malbec, although cabernet sauvignon, chenin, merlot, chardonnay, and Syrah are all bottled here as well. Many of the *bodegas* in this zone lie within 1 hour's drive of Mendoza, making tours very convenient. I suggest you begin your touring here, where there is great variety and many visitor-friendly *bodegas* to choose from. South of Mendoza, the beautiful and rural **Uco Valley Region** ★★, including Tunuyán, Tupungato, and San Carlos, produces excellent Malbec, Semillon (a white), and Torrontés (another white, very floral, like a Muscadet, and more common in Salta). Allow at least 2 hours to reach this area. It's a long drive but certainly worth the effort. Farthest away, the **South Region,** between San Rafael and General Alvear, is fed by the Atuel and Diamante rivers. Its best varieties are Malbec, Bonarda, and cabernet sauvignon. Off the tourist track, you will need at least a day to visit this region.

The **Mendoza East Region** is the province's largest wine-producing area in terms of quantity (not necessarily quality). There is little tourism infrastructure here.

With so many wineries (more than 650 at last count), it can be difficult to figure out which to visit. Some are massive, modern industrial complexes funded by foreign investors. Others are traditional "boutique" wineries run by the same family for generations. Most are open from Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturdays 10am to 3pm; some are now open from noon to 3pm on Sundays, although the Sunday visit slots are usually booked up early. Reservations are usually required for visits. Wineries are increasingly

Sunday Hours

Sunday is a day for Argentines to be with family and have an *asado* barbecue. In Mendoza, as in most of the country, most shops, restaurants, and wineries are not open, with the exception of a handful of *bodegas* and the local mall (Mendoza Shopping Plaza).

charging for visits, partly to offset the fact that visitors are buying less wine in-house due to luggage restrictions. Still, compared to elsewhere in the world, a $7 (£4.75) tasting remains a bargain.

Tour Operators

Local tour operators have the inside scoop on everything from booking rural inns to in-depth presentations on the local wine scene. They can make your time in Mendoza more carefree, helping you navigate the rural roads of Mendoza, and narrowing down the hundreds of *bodegas* to choose from. All you have to do is relax, soak up the gorgeous views, and indulge in some fabulous food and wine.

Ampora Wine Tours ★ (✆ **261/429-2931;** www.mendozawinetours.com) offers small-group wine tours that visit some of the most interesting wineries in the area. Groups run from two to eight, and trips to either Luján-Maipú or the Valle de Uco, go out just about every day. Their guides are friendly and trips include a big lunch, with wine of course.

Bikes and Wines (✆ **261/410-6686;** www.bikesandwines.com) rents bikes from a handful of spots in the wine country (you can take a local bus to get their hubs), provides an easy-to-follow self-guided route map that includes a handful of close-by *bodega* visits, and books you for lunch. The first winery visit is "free," and then the rest have a charge. While the concept of bike tours in wine country may be successful in other parts of the world, it's still problematic here. Mendocinos are notoriously aggressive drivers, and bike lanes are nonexistent! This is the most budget-conscious (if adrenaline-charging) way to see the wineries.

Mendoza Holidays (✆ **261/429-7730;** www.mendozaholidays.com) has private 1-day tours in the wine country starting at $165 (£112) and multiday tours in wine country that include lodging. It also organizes ski trips to Las Leñas, starting at $1,000 (£676) a week.

Trout & Wine ★ (✆ **261/429-8302;** www.troutandwine.com) runs in-depth and personalized wine tours in Maipú, Uco Valley, and Luján de Cuyo. They know the people behind almost every vineyard in the area, offering a chance to get a more personalized, close-up experience. Tours are limited to six people, and special tastings are arranged. Guests also get a gift pack of wine. As their name suggests, they also run fly-fishing tours.

Uncorking Argentina (✆ **866/529-2861** or 261/429-3830; www.uncorkingargentina.com) is run by a transplanted Californian who has a deep knowledge of wine and has friends throughout the local wine country—a "wine educator" whose trips are informative, in-depth, and fun. All-inclusive 9-day tours start at $2,800 (£1,893). She also teaches short wine-tasting classes if you have a free evening and want to brush up before you head out.

CHACRAS DE CORIA ★★

14km (8½ miles) S of Mendoza

Many travelers use this lovely, leafy suburb of Mendoza as a base for trips to the region. And it's easy to see why: It's convenient to both the city center (20 min. away) and to the *bodegas* area; it has a rich heritage, great restaurants, and a handful of excellent inns; and it's fun and relaxing. This is my first choice for those looking to base their visit away from the hustle of downtown Mendoza.

Getting There

Chacras is accessible via local bus no. 10, which stops on La Rioja Street in downtown Mendoza, or via taxi, which is $30 to $35 (£20–£24) from downtown. It is feasible to tour the area on a day outing from the city, combining a few *bodegas* and a stroll through the town center—either via the bus, with a driver, in a rented car, or on an organized tour. If you are driving, take the Corredor del Oeste south of Mendoza and follow the signs into the heart of town.

Getting Around

Once you're in Chacras, you can walk to virtually everywhere, including some *bodegas* and some great restaurants.

Where to Stay

Casa Glebinias Just down the street from Borravino (see below), this quiet inn is a gardener's delight, nestled amid what may be Chacras's greatest botanical display. Rooms are actually separate houses, each with lovely views of the garden outside each window. Interiors are decorated with an eclectic mix of treasures in a wide range of styles, from Art Deco mirrors and antique window frames, to natural history sketches. All units have a kitchenette, and the staff brings breakfast to your door each morning. This is not a good choice for those who don't like dogs.

Medrano 2272, Chacras de Coria. ✆ **261/496-2116.** www.casaglebinias.com. From $145 (£98) suite. MC, V. **Amenities:** Pool; garden; Internet; library. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen.

Finca Adalgisa ★★ This is authentic Mendoza: an old family *bodega,* converted into a tranquil and fully authentic inn. Run by the pioneering young *hotelera* Gabriela Furlotti, the inn blends old and new, from the slick, modern lounge where you can sample from the *bodega*'s limited production of annual Malbecs, to a century-old *casa vieja,* or traditional private residence. In the lush backyard, facing the pool, a stone house has six spacious suites. The middle rooms have two stories. Friendly and helpful staff members make you feel at home, and will help you make reservations at other vineyards or restaurants. Guests can enjoy a complimentary bottle of wine and cheese plate, lemonade by the pool, or *café con leche* anytime.

Pueyrredon 2222, Chacras de Coria. ✆ **261/496-0713.** www.fincaadalgisa.com.ar. 11 rooms. $235 (£129) double; $315 (£213) suite. MC, V. **Amenities:** Lounge; wine cellar; pool; bicycles; high-speed Internet. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi, kitchenettes, safe.

Posada Borravino Value This stylish and affordable option is modern, yet with a rustic feel. In an old home on a very quiet street, it's only a few blocks from the town square. Interiors are all natural colors, mainly various shades of beige. Quarters are a bit tight; the backyard pool is minuscule. But the staff is friendly enough and the common space—which includes a rotating art exhibit—is inviting.

Medrano 2658, Chacras de Coria. ✆ **261/496-4445.** www.posadaborravino.com. 8 units. $85 (£57) double. MC, V. **Amenities:** Pool; bicycles; grill. *In room:* A/C, TV, Wi-Fi.

Posada Robles de Besares (Kids) This five-room bed-and-breakfast is owned and run by a local family. The owners recently converted this old summer home into a lovely inn. And since they have young kids of their own, they're happy to share the backyard pool, tennis court, and swing set with visiting youngsters, while the parents enjoy the gym or the wine cellar. Although prices have risen extensively, it's still a great option for families.

796 Besares, Chacras de Coria. ✆ **261/496-3934.** www.roblesdebesares.com.ar. 5 units. $240 (£162) double; $425 (£287) 2-bedroom suite. V. **Amenities:** Wine cellar; pool; tennis court; gym; bicycles. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Where to Dine

Café Flora (Kids) CAFE/DELI Just half a block from the plaza, the vibe is sweet and friendly, and the specialty here is fresh, local food, served throughout the day. The "avepalta" chicken and avocado sandwich is fantastic; it's a relief if all you want is a small meal. Other sandwiches, including a classic roast beef *lomo,* also stand out. Run by two well-known locals, it also has a small children's play area outside.

Italia 5571, Chacras de Coria. ✆ **261/496-5445.** Main courses $6–$10 (£4.05–£6.80). MC, V. Wed–Fri 6pm–midnight; Sat–Sun 9:30am–midnight.

Karma ASIAN This restaurant is definitely exotic; as much a fresh face in these parts as is its owner, Karma Apo Tsang who came to Mendoza to act in the film *Seven Years in Tibet* and never left. The vibe is ashram cool, and the food, most of it steam-cooked and colorful, is refreshingly spicy for Argentina. Look for beef dumplings, Hong Kong ribs and chicken, pork or lamb curry.

Italia 6055, Chacras de Coria. ✆ **261/496-1731.** Main courses $10–$15 (£6.80–£10). MC, V. Tues–Sat 9pm–2am.

La Piadina ★ (Finds) ITALIAN This traditional Italian cantina serves outstanding homemade pastas and pizzas on rustic northern Italian crusts. Low-key and unassuming, it's a place in which to mingle with the locals and to indulge. The pumpkin-stuffed ravioli with mushroom sauce is delicious. Also worth trying are the carrot pappardelle and the tortellini with ricotta, ham, and walnuts.

Italia 5723, Chacras de Coria. ✆ **261/496-4068.** Main courses $9–$15 (£6.10–£10). MC, V. Daily 8:30pm–1am.

What to See & Do

An authentic mix of traditional rural life and upscale modern infrastructure characterizes the heart of Chacras, founded in 1600. **Plaza General Espejo,** the delightful town square, hosts an **antiques fair** ★ on Sunday afternoons. The whitewashed neocolonial parish church, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, faces the plaza. Very good restaurants are within a few blocks from the center (see above).

The most interesting winery in Chacras is **Bodega y Cavas de Weinert,** San Martín 5923 (✆ **261/496-4676;** www.bodegaweinert.com), a large operation that exports high-quality wines around the world and continues using large oak barrels. It's in a quintessential old Spanish-style villa, and the downstairs tasting room is musky and dark, just as a cellar should be. Just steps from the main drag, **Bodega Clos de Chacras** ★★, Monte Libano s/n (✆ **261/496-1285;** www.closdechacras.com.ar), is a boutique winery inside

a historic building. Their wines have been receiving many international awards, and their bilingual guides are excellent.

To the south of Chacras is the **Museo de Bellas Artes de Mendoza,** San Martín 3651 (✆ **261/496-0224;** admission $1/70p), also known as the Museo Fader, after its chief painter, Fernando Fader. Housed in a brick mansion surrounded by a lovely garden, rooms are dedicated to national and international artists.

Farther down the same road is **Bodega Lagarde,** San Martín 1745 (✆ **261/498-0011;** www.lagarde.com.ar), one of the oldest and most traditional wineries in Mendoza, with the credo that wines should reflect the vineyards. It is a relaxed, friendly winery that hasn't been slicked up for tourists, so it's a bit untidy. The tour includes a fun lesson in champagne bottling, and they now offer an extensive five-course country-style lunch for $45 (£30).

Chacras de Coria After Dark

Some of Mendoza's top nightclubs are in Chacras de Coria, side by side along the Panamericano Highway. Some of the names are ever-changing, but look for La Guanaca, Pasión, or Cemento.

LUJAN DE CUYO

17km (11 miles) S of Mendoza

Just south of Chacras de Coria, Luján de Cuyo proudly proclaims itself "La Tierra del Malbec," the land of Malbec. The area's dry, hot weather and high altitudes make it an ideal growing place for full-bodied wines. In the distance, the eternally snowcapped Cordón del Plata mountain range dominates the views. A large area made up of a few sprawling towns, this is the place to explore the success and allure of Argentina's most hyped *vino tinto.* The town of Luján de Cuyo, at the center of the region, offers little to visitors except for a few great ice-cream shops.

Getting There

Luján de Cuyo is a vast area. The main *bodegas,* in and around Agrelo and Pedriel, can be accessed by public bus no. 10 from downtown Mendoza, which takes you into the center of Luján. From there, you need to take a taxi to outlying areas. If you are driving, take Hwy. 40 south of Mendoza.

Getting Around

If you've arrived by bus, grab a taxi from the center of town to reach the *bodegas.* If you are driving, stick to main roads and follow well-marked signs to each *bodega.* None are too far from a main national or provincial highway, and most are well marked.

Visitor Information

The **Visitor Information Center,** 1000 Saenz Peña (✆ **261/498-1912**), is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 6pm and on weekends from 10am to 4pm.

Where to Stay & Dine

In addition to the restaurants in this section, many of the *bodegas* listed below in "What to See & Do" also serve lunch.

Cavas Wine Lodge ★ This lodge is an oasis of luxury amid a vast vineyard, with the High Andes serving as a stunning backdrop. Everything here is private, high-end, and the feeling is definitively exclusive. Suites are scattered two-by-two in spacious adobe bungalows throughout the vineyard, all facing west to the mountains. Inside, rooms are

Bottle Your Own (& Maybe Buy a Bodega While You're at It)

Who wouldn't want to own his or her own piece of the Luján de Cuyo paradise? You can become the proud owner of a vineyard estate, and bottle your own premium wine as part of **Finca Los Amigos** (www.fincalosamigos.com), one of a number of similar projects in the area. The Mendoza Vineyard Village is a 150-hectare (370-acre) complex of vines that is to be subdivided into 25 individual vineyards and 50 estate homes. For prices starting at $33,000 (£22,300), potential homeowners can become "vineyard members," with access to an exclusive resort that comes with oenologists to help you impress your friends.

impeccably detailed, with big beds. The ceilings and walls are curved, and bathrooms include soaker tubs. Each unit has a private outdoor hot tub and a stunning upstairs terrace—it's impossible to say which offers a better view of the sun setting behind the Andes. A peaceful spa, a stoked wine cellar, and a first-rate restaurant are on-site as well. Though it is far from town and inconvenient if your goal is to tour a lot, Cavass is ideal, however, for those seeking seclusion and romance. Ask about packages for multinight stays.

Costa Flores s/n, Alto Agrelo. ✆ **261/15-454-4118** (cell). www.cavaswinelodge.com. 14 units. $460 (£311) double; $580 (£392) suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; wine cellar; pool; gym; spa; bicycles. *In room:* A/C, TV, CD players, high-speed Internet, minibar, fireplace, private deck, private Jacuzzi.

La Bourgogne ★★★ FRENCH This restaurant may be the best one in Mendoza, and it certainly rivals any other in the country. Famed chef Jean Paul Bondoux has trusted local Federico Zeigler with his signature blend of French techniques and local ingredients. Set inside Carlos Pulenta's modern and serene Vistalba winery, the menu is incredibly creative (cold avocado soup with fennel and onions) and surprising (pumpkin and grapefruit ravioli in prawn broth). Fish of the day is served with watercress, couscous, and wasabi crisps; duck breast is prepared with chestnuts in a Malbec sauce. The wine list is exceptional—don't miss the Vistalba Corte B blends, and don't be shy about asking your waiter or the friendly sommelier for suggestions. It's now open for lunch only.

R Saenz Peña 3531. ✆ **261/498-9421.** www.carlospulentawines.com. Main courses $8–$15 (£5.40–£10). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat 12:30–3pm.

What to See & Do

Luján de Cuyo is home to many, many *bodegas.* We've selected the most visitor-friendly and unique ones, to give you a taste of what is out there. Also worth considering are **Alta Vista** (✆ **261/496-4684;** www.altavistawines.com); **Terrazas de Los Andes** (✆ **261/488-0058;** www.terrazasdelosandes.com); **Familia Belasco** (✆ **261/524-7864;** www.familiabelasco.com), which has a fun and interesting scent-discovery room; and **Achaval Ferrer** (✆ **261/498-4874;** www.achaval-ferrer.com).

Bodegas

Bodega Catena Zapata ★ This strange Mayan temple is the showcase for one of Argentina's most respected and influential winemakers, Nicolás Catena. His journey from California to the top of the crop in Argentina is legendary, and he is usually credited for giving birth to the Malbec boom. The microclimate here is exemplary of the Luján *terroir.* It's not a very personalized or informative tour, but there is a short film that

provides a good background and a tour gives an insight into one of the most important families in Mendoza.

Cobos, Agrelo. ✆ **261/490-0214.** www.catenawines.com. Reservations required. Free tours with standard tasting Mon–Fri 9:30am and 11am, 2 and 3:30pm; Sat 9:30 and 11am.

Bodega Ruca Malen ★ This is one of many French-owned *bodegas* in the Luján area. The state-of-the-art orange brick building is known for its outstanding four-course *bodega* lunches that highlight pairings from the winery's top two lines: Ruca Malen and Kinien. The guides are entertaining, and the atmosphere is posh and generous. Tour costs are discounted if you purchase wine.

RN 7, Km 1059. ✆ **261/410-6214.** www.bodegarucamalen.com. Reservations required. English-language tours Mon–Fri 10am and 3pm, Sat 10am; tours with lunch Mon–Sat noon and 2pm. Tours $10 (£6.80). Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat 10am–12:30pm.

El Lagar Carmelo Patti (Finds) Patti is the real deal—a winemaker who welcomes each visitor like a family member, while maintaining traditions that date back centuries. A bohemian artist and wine scholar, he'll offer you a tasting straight from the barrel, which is a rarity. Señor Patti's English isn't great, so it's a good idea to bring along a guide if you don't speak Spanish well, to help you appreciate him fully (see "Tour Operators," earlier in this chapter). When it's time for a tasting, see if you can convince Carmelo to uncork a bottle of the 2002 Gran Assemblage blend.

San Martín 2614. ✆ **261/498-1379.** Tour reservations required. Free tours Mon–Fri 10am–4pm.

Finca Decero A brand-new single-vineyard winery (they make all their wine from one single piece of land) that's making high-quality wines in their trademark "by hand" style, it's worth visiting Decero to see their modern and incredibly gentle basket press. They have a very good sit-down "tasting pairing" tour that includes a deli plate.

Bajo las Cumbres 9003, Agrelo. ✆ **261/524-4747.** Reservations required. Tours $8 (£5.40), available by request only Mon–Fri 9:30am–3pm and Sat–Sun 10am–2pm.

Luigi Bosca The Arizu family, which owns one of the most prolific wineries in the country, has welcomed tourists for decades—so many tourists, in fact, that buses line up outside to get in. Regardless, it's worth a stop to see inside a vast operation. Don't miss the champagne either.

San Martín 2044. ✆ **261/498-1974.** www.luigibosca.com. Tour reservations required. Tours $5 (£3.40). Tours run 10:30am, 3 and 5pm.

Tapiz ★ This winemaker is the creator of the label known as Zolo in North America. Your tour begins with a horse-drawn carriage ride through the property. After a chance to touch and feel the vines, head in for a taste of whatever wine they're featuring that day. All tours are private. The guide, Carolina Fuller, is an unpretentious professional who makes you feel like you are the only visitor. They also have a fabulous lodge and restaurant in Maipú (p. 287).

RP 15, Km 32. Agrelo ✆ **261/490-0202.** www.tapiz.com.ar. Reservations required. Tour cost of $8.50 (£5.75) waived with purchase of wine or lunch at Terruños. Free tour with standard tasting Mon–Fri 10am, noon, 2 and 4pm; Sat 10am and noon only.

Vistalba Carlos Pulenta, the man behind Vistalba, is a star here for his dedication to quality and *terroir*. The winery is a vision of technological wonder, while the downstairs tasting room is stunning, with its natural wall.

 R. Saenz Peña 3531. ✆ **261/498-9400.** www.carlospulentawines.com. Reservations required. Tastings $8–$16 (£5.40–£11) per person, depending on the label. Free tours Mon–Sat 10:30am, noon, 3 and 4:30pm.

Other Attractions

It's not all about wine here in the Land of Malbec. There are also engineering and religious wonders, as well as the chance to explore the mountains around Luján.

The **Cipolleti Dike,** for instance, is a study of Mendoza's intricate system of aqueducts. Known as *el dique Cipoletti* in Spanish, it's in the Vistalba area of Luján. Built by Cesare Cipolletti in 1895, this dike or diversion dam regulates the flow of the Mendoza River and directs its water into various channels, some heading through the fertile vineyards and others forming the Guaymallén Channel, which moves water through the heart of downtown Mendoza and into all those lovely fountains. The Italian hydraulic engineer who organized the irrigation infrastructure here, as well as aqueducts in Florence and on the Tiber River, is a true Mendozan hero, buried nearby. In the near distance is a major oil refinery run by YPF. You'll likely see this dike if you take a standard 1-day tour of the Mendoza area with one of the operators listed earlier in this chapter. Wine tours also drive nearby and would take a detour if you requested it. You'll also pass nearby if you are on a tour of the Alta Montaña on your way to Potrerillos. If you're in possession of a rental car, this engineering marvel is worth a visit on its own. The dike is situated just south of the Mendoza River and west of the Panamerican Hwy. 40. Take RP Hwy. 87.

If you have a spare day and just want to relax, head to the bubbly **Termas Cacheuta,** RP 82, Km 38, Thermas de Cacheuta (✆ **262/449-0152;** www.termascacheuta.com), for some thermal soaking. There is a natural cave, hydro-massage therapy, and a beautiful garden. You can visit for the entire day and have a gourmet lunch for $35 (£24), including transfers from Mendoza. A cheaper option is to bring a picnic and enjoy the nine thermal pools only. With transfers, that runs you $9 (£6.10).

The **Iglesia de la Virgen de Carrodilla** ★, corner of San Martín and Carrodilla, Luján de Cuyo (✆ **261/435-1667**), the home of the patron saint of Mendozan wine, is also worth a visit. This Virgen is displayed in a painting brought from Spain 1811 that shows Mary pushing a cart, with a child in one arm and grapes in the other. The Spaniard believer built a chapel close to his house to house the painting, which is now a popular historic monument. In 1938, she was consecrated the patron saint of vineyards. The adobe-walled church includes wonderful wine-themed murals. The church museum next door has an interesting collection of Catholic artwork. It's open Monday through Saturday from 9am to noon and 4:30 to 7:30pm. The Virgen de Carrodilla is venerated annually during the Vendimia Festival in March. Across the street is an empanada stand where you can grab a snack.

MAIPU

14km (8½ miles) NW of Mendoza

The Maipú region includes vast fields of olives and fruit as well as grape vines. In fact, locals cherish olives every bit as much as grapes here—evinced by the annual National Festival of Olives held in the second half of February each year. If you feel like you are in Tuscany as you roam the shade-lined streets and rural roads, you're not far off the mark: Peek inside any home, and you'll notice that most inhabitants are of Italian descent—which explains their love of good food, good wine, and the good life. Like Luján de Cuyo, Maipú is both a sprawling rural region and a town with the same name.

Getting There

Take a 15- to 25-minute taxi ride from downtown Mendoza, or 30 minutes from the Mendoza airport. Or catch the local bus no. 151 or 160 from the stop on La Rioja street—it'll take you into the center of the town of Maipú. Drivers should head south on Hwy. 40 and turn east at Juan J. Paso to get to the center. Other turnoffs will take you to outlying vineyards.

Getting Around

Flat and leafy, Maipú is a great place for biking (see "Tour Operators," earlier in this chapter). Alternately, taxis can take you from the bus stop to wherever you need to go.

Visitor Information

There is a visitor information center at Ozamis 19 (✆ **261/492-2448**).

Where to Stay & Dine

Almacén del Sur DELICATESSEN The journey from garden to table is incredibly short at Almacén del Sur. Before seating you, staff members guide you through the herb and vegetable gardens, to demonstrate how fresh the ingredients are. Then you head inside a refurbished farmhouse for your meal. The dishes highlight their gourmet line of deli products sold across the country, including green tomato chutney, cipollino onions in balsamic vinegar, and rose petal preserve. The five-course lunch is definitely not cheap, and does not include wine.

Zanichelli 709, Coquimbito. ✆ **261/410-6597.** www.almacendelsur.com. Reservations highly recommended. Lunch menu $50 (£34) for 5 courses. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 12:30–4pm.

Club Tapiz One of the top lodges in the area is built in an old home dating to the 1890s, tucked inside a 10-hectare (25-acre) vineyard, which you can explore on bike or on foot without having to cross a road. The seven guest rooms are simple and tidy, with modern touches, king-size beds, and bright, if simple, bathrooms. Ask for a room with a window onto the back garden, and be sure to save time for a few hours in the peaceful spa. Rooms start at $125 (£84) a night, including a big buffet breakfast and wine tastings each evening. It's a good deal. The inn is close enough to other *bodegas* to keep you busy for a few days.

Pedro Molina s/n. ✆ **261/496-4815.** www.tapiz.com.ar. 7 units. Doubles start at $190 (£128). AE. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; wine cellar; pool; spa; game room; business center; high-speed Internet. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Divina Marga ★ Finds ARGENTINE This new bistro is in a refurbished country home on the rugged shore of the Mendoza River, and has a stunning décor both inside and out. For an appetizer, don't miss the sweetbread empanadas. Try the trout with sun-dried tomato paste and almond sauce or the *ojo de bife* (rib eye). Simple grilled local vegetables in a lemon sauce is a light alternative. A cellar downstairs is predictably heavy on the big local wineries, but the giant patio is romantic under the night sky. Kinks still have to be worked out in the kitchen, but this place will certainly draw beautiful people to a beautiful corner of Maipú.

Calle Publica s/n, Lunlunta. ✆ **261/15-5702-2700.** Reservations required. Main courses $10–$15 (£6.80–£10). AE, MC, V. Daily 1–3:30pm and 8:30pm–1am.

Terruños Restaurant ★ FUSION Inside the Club Tapiz lodge complex, this restaurant is likewise housed in a restored colonial home. Elegant yet funky, the menu blends French, Italian, and Asian tendencies without distracting too much from the

sensational wine list. The pork stuffed with dates in a Malbec sauce is divine, and the young goat cooked in white wine is pure Mendoza. Desserts include a tiramisu truffle and a Malbec parfait. The tea menu is also impressive. On summer nights, ask for an upstairs table on the west side, for killer views.

Pedro Molina s/n, Russel. ✆ **261/496-0131.** Reservations required. Main courses $16–$23 (£11–£16). AE. Daily noon–3pm and 8:30pm–1am.

Exploring Bodegas

In addition to the *bodegas* listed fully here, others worth exploring include **San Telmo** (✆ **261/499-0050**), **Finca Flichman** (✆ **261/497-2039;** www.flichman.com.ar), and the quaint and tiny **Baquero 1886** (✆ **261/429-3915;** www.baquerowines.com/winery.htm).

Bodega Benegas A *bodega* that's as much a museum as a wine cellar, this winery is part of Mendoza's history. Built in 1901 by a former governor, the excellent Andean *poncho* collection is as interesting as the wine.

Accesso Sur and Ruta 60 (Carril Araoz s/n), Cruz de Piedra. ✆ **261/496-0794.** www.bodegabenegas.com. $9.50 (£6.40) visit includes tastings, Mon–Sat 9am–6pm.

Bodega La Rural ★ Founded by Don Felipe Rutini in 1885, this traditional *bodega* maintains an excellent reputation. It's best known for its Trumpeter, San Felipe, and Rutini labels. Next door, the excellent **Museo de Vino** (same contact information), is Latin America's most prestigious wine museum. A great place to start your exploration of Mendoza's wines, it pays tribute to the pioneers of Mendozan wine, and provides information on local geology.

Montecaseros 2625, Coquimbito. ✆ **261/497-2013.** www.bodegalarural.com.ar. Reservations are not necessary. Free tour with standard tasting. Rutini and Felipe Rutini tastings require a reservation and fees are charged ($18–$47/£12–£32), Mon–Sat 9am–1pm and 2–5pm.

Carinae Viñedos & Bodega This *bodega* is receiving a lot of buzz. Owned and run by a very friendly and low-key French couple, Brigitte and Philippe Subra, it's a true boutique *bodega*. Their latest vintages—mostly Malbec, with smaller quantities of Syrah and cabernet sauvignon—have far exceeded any expectations for what was considered a small, unpretentious family project. For an extra $3 (£2) a glass, you can sample their award-winning 2004 Carinae Prestige.

Videla Aranda 2899, Cruz de Piedra. ✆ **261/499-0470.** www.carinaevinos.com. Tour with tasting $3.50 (£2.35) per person. Daily 10am–6pm.

Familia Zuccardi Familia Zuccardi is perhaps the most savvy and tourist-friendly *bodega* in the area. They serve lunch, dinner, and even high tea. Their multiday programs give you a deeper understanding of Mendoza's wines and cuisine. This authentic family winery is known for its high production. It's located to the east of Mendoza, making it a bit tricky to combine with other winery visits.

RP 33, Km 7.5. ✆ **261/441-0000.** www.familiazuccardi.com. Free tour and tastings. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm; Sun 10am–4pm.

Mendel The owners of the lovely Las Balsas inn in Villa La Angostura are behind this winery that's shot to fame of late. It's renowned winemaker, Roberto de la Mota, hand-picked the 80-year-old Malbec vines.

Terrada 1863, Mayor Drummond. ✆ **261/498-4239.** www.mendel.com.ar. Visits by appointment only.

When to Visit

Mendoza is alive four seasons of the year. In winter (June–Aug), you can combine very quiet wine touring with great skiing at Las Leñas (see "Hitting the Slopes in Las Leñas," later in this chapter). In spring (Sept–Nov), the whole area is in bloom. Days are warm, and the air is remarkably aromatic. The hot summer months from December through February require a good sun hat and access to a pool. My personal favorite time to visit is the fall (Mar–May), when the *vendimia* wine harvesting is wrapping up, the alamo and poplar trees glow golden, and the nights are fresh.

Tapaus Distillery This distillery provides a welcome break from grapes. The focus here is on liquor—more precisely, liqueur: brandy, grappa (okay, they use some grapes), and fruit liqueurs. The architecture and design may have your head spinning—if it isn't already.

F. Villanueva 3826. ✆ **261/499-0514.** www.tapaus.com.ar. Free tour with standard tasting. Mon–Sat noon–6pm; Sun by appointment only.

Tempus Alba This is another family establishment dedicated to maintaining a noble, hands-on approach to winemaking. Tours are in-depth and detailed. Come in the morning for more personalized attention; afternoons are often swamped with visitors.

Carril P. Moreno 572, Coquimbito. ✆ **261/481-3501.** www.tempusalba.com. Free tour; tastings $2.50 (£1.70) per glass, or 3 glasses for $4.50 (£3.05). Mon–Fri 10am–5pm.

Other Local Farms

In Maipú, numerous farms allow visitors to explore the production of olive oil and indulge in sensual tastings and appreciation courses. **Quinta Generación,** Ozamis Sur 2718 (✆ **261/499-0472**), is a boutique olive oil factory that runs guided tours and tastings. Nearby, **Isabel Agrovivero,** Ceferino 544, Cruz de Piedra (✆ **261/410-6325**), also produces figs, walnuts, and grapes. Their tours are very good, and the shop is stocked with goodies. An old olive oil factory, **Laur** ★, Videla Aranda 2850, Cruz del Piedra (✆ **261/499-0052**), puts on a show for gourmands—including a presentation on the health benefits of olive oil.

VALLE DE UCO ★★

90km (56 miles) S of Mendoza

Everything seems to stand still in the remote, high-altitude Valle de Uco, which may not last for long as word spreads about the incredible wines coming from here (and the incredible characters that have been drawn here to make them). The scenery is divine, and the towns are sleepy and rural, with an Old West feel. The current "it spot" for groundbreaking wines, La Consulta, has attracted luminaries such as Michel Rolland, Paul Hobbs, and the Lurton brothers. Altitude varies from 800m (262 ft.) in Tunuyán to 1,200m (3,936 ft.) in Tupungato, some of the highest-altitude wineries in the world. Winters here can be very cold, and summers are warm with cooler nights, which helps produce superior color and tannins. This area makes an excellent day trip from Mendoza.

Getting There

The main towns of Tupungato and Tunuyán can be reached by local bus from the Mendoza bus terminal. If you are driving, take Hwy. 40 south from Mendoza city. Well-placed signs point you to the major vineyards.

Getting Around

You'll need a car or a hired driver to tour this area. Most distances are too great for biking, and local buses are few and far between.

Where to Stay & Dine

Numerous hotel plans are in the works for the Valle de Uco, including an inn at the O. Fournier bodega (see below), and a hotel/spa in Vista Flores, run by the Vines of Mendoza. There's also an interesting new restaurant slated to be called **Tupungato Divino.** In the meantime, there are fantastically good lunches at such wineries as O. Fournier and Andeluna (see below).

Casa Antucura ★ If you are used to luxury, then you'll feel at home at this exclusive, secluded, high-class and haven't-overlooked-a-thing wine lodge in the lovely Vista Flores district. A massive library, personal chef, large outdoor pool, world-class art collection, there's even a minicinema! The lodge is set amid the Antucura vineyard and has outstanding mountain views. Each plush room is decorated in its own style, with massive windows, large bathrooms, DVD players. Service is profoundly personalized. It's a slice of paradise, indeed.

Barandica s/n, Vista Flores. ✆ **261/15-454-1432.** www.casaantucura.com. 8 units. Suites $450–$790 (£304–£534). AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; wine cellar; pool; spa; Jacuzzi; library; small cinema. *In room:* DVD player.

La Posada del Jamón Finds CHARCUTERIE This "ham inn," which started as a sandwich and cold cuts shop, is not what you'd expect to find in this region. Despite its kitschy all-pig theme, it's honest, humble, and a rare find. Come for the sausages, cured meats, head cheese, or pork tenderloin with homemade applesauce (some say it's the best pork in the country). The vegetarian lasagna is also good. The family-run service here is great. In summer, ask for an outdoor table for beautiful views.

RP 92, Km 14, Vista Flores, Tunuyán. ✆ **262/249-2053.** www.laposadadeljamon.com.ar. Main courses $8–$14 (£5.40–£9.45). V. Daily noon–4pm; Thurs–Fri 8pm–midnight.

Posada Salentein ★ Tucked behind the massive Salentein winery complex, this rural posada has an old-time, secluded ranch feel that doesn't overdo the wine theme. Eight comfortable rooms are set in two buildings—a rustic old house and a brighter new one. The upstairs Merlot room has a private balcony. All rooms have kitchenettes. The European owners' art collection is also on display throughout the property. The Argentine-style menu at the restaurant is very personalized and fresh, for lunch and dinner. This area is particularly gorgeous in the fall when the alamo trees are golden. This is a fine place in which to get away from it all (including television).

Ruta 89 and Videla, Los Arboles, Tunuyán. ✆ **262/242-9000.** www.bodegasalentein.com. 8 units. $300–$360 (£203–£243) double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; pool; business center; TV lounge.

Rancho 'e Cuero ★★ This classic Argentine mountain *estancia* has no frills, no spa, no TVs in rooms, and no five-star restaurant. What it does have is seemingly endless acreage, great hospitality, and plenty of opportunities for adventure—including horseback riding, hikes to glaciers, and fly-fishing. Deep in the mountains and far from the

wineries, the lodge is remarkably comfortable. Watch for foxes and guanacos (cousins of the llama) in the hills, and condors in the skies. You need a good vehicle to get here on your own or need to arrange a transfer with the lodge directly. They also offer lovely day excursions, a spectacular break from the wine touring and a unique chance to hike, horseback ride, and enjoy the mountains all in 1 day.

RP 86, Ugarteche, Tupungato. ✆ **261/15-569-2364** (cell). www.ranchoecuero.com.ar. 6 units. $370 (£250) per person per day. Rates include full board and activities. V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; stable; transfers; living room. *In room:* No phone.

Valle de Uco Lodge This classic Jesuit-style lodge is in the middle of the Valle de Uco, 10 minutes west of Tunuyán. A rustic but upscale country retreat, it encompasses tree-lined paths, expansive gardens, and breathtaking views of the Andes. The nine double and triple rooms are laid out in two buildings in a U-shape around a pool, garden, and Malbec vines that stretch to the mountains. Huge bathrooms, high ceilings, and soft colors characterize the rooms. The location is good, close to lots of wineries, and this is a good base for bike tours. There's a concierge on staff who'll help you with logistics. However, you really need a car to come here. The restaurant/lounge is a cozy, familiar spot in which to unwind with a sample from the expansive wine cellar.

Calle Tabanera s/n, Colonia de Las Rosas, Tunuyán. ✆ **261/426-1888,** or 800/963-7870 from North America. www.postalesarg.com. 9 units. $200 (£135) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; wine bar; pool; high-speed Internet. *In room:* A/C, TV, safe.

What to See & Do

Wineries flourish in all corners of the Valle de Uco. This "New Napa"—the Mendoza region's "it spot"—is specifically near the village of La Consulta, where vineyards such as Clos de La Siete, San Polo, and O. Fournier are making a big name for themselves. Wineries here are part of a rural countryside that differs from the more urban areas of Maipú and Luján de Cuyo. The colder temperatures make for strong production of merlot and pinot noir wines.

If you are looking for a break from the wine-haze, head to the hills. To the south of the Valle de Uco is the spectacular **Laguna del Diamante** ★★, well worth a day trip from either San Rafael or Mendoza city itself. At 3,230m (1,059 ft.), this natural reservoir is backed by the gorgeous Maipú Volcano. The scenery is otherworldly. Take a driver and a good truck. It's open for 4 months in the summer only. **TosoBoehler** (✆ **261/15-454-9005** [cell]) organizes tours in first-rate 4WD vehicles; including a barbecue lunch at the lake, it's $75 (£51) per person.

Tips Come to Harvest

If you're going to be in Mendoza between February and April, the **Zuccardi family** invites you to come pick some grapes at their vineyard, Finca Santa Rosa. This unique program gives wine aficionados a day of hands-on work in the field. After a short tutorial, guests receive scissors and a basket and then set to work for 2 hours. Afterward, the Zuccardis serve a fantastic lunch (with ample wine), followed by a tour and tasting. It's a real bargain at $60 (£41) per person, including lunch, a tour and tasting, and transportation to and from your hotel. Reservations are required (✆ **261/441-0000;** turismo@familiazuccardi.com).

The Story of Mendoza's Wine

Blessed by rich sunlight and a panorama of snow-filled mountains, Mendoza dominates Argentina's winemaking industry, and it's one of the most successful wine regions on earth. Surrounding the beautiful city of Mendoza, just to the east of the towering Andes, the province accounts for more than 70% of the nation's wine production, and it's the world's sixth-largest producer of grapes.

The Spanish began cultivating Mendoza's wild American vines in the 16th century as well as grapes they'd brought with them from the Old Continent, and wine production soon dominated the region's economy. They were able to harvest this semiarid land—which receives little natural rainfall—by using a vast irrigation system originally developed by the Incas and extended by the Huarpes, indigenous people from the region. A series of artificial irrigation ditches and canals divert water from the Mendoza, Diamante, Tunuyán, and Atuel rivers, which fill as snow melts in the Andes to nourish the land.

The development of Mendoza's wine industry ebbed and flowed. Wine production stalled in the late 18th century as Spain restricted grape growing to prevent competition with its colonies. The industry was renewed following national independence, as European experts introduced French grapevine stocks and wineries to the region. However, the earthquake of 1861 destroyed most of the existing wineries, and it was not until the opening of a railroad in 1884 that wine production resumed on a significant scale. The railway brought

Andeluna ★ An absolutely beautiful, shiny new winery owned by Texan (and lover of all things Argentine) Ward Lay has a lovely old-world feel. Gourmet lunches are also served, with reservations only. Lay's brought together a top-notch team of winemakers. Tastings are held in a sumptuous "living room" with a stellar mountain view.

RP 89, Km 11, Gualtallary, Tupungato. ✆ **262/242-3226.** www.andeluna.com. Reservations required. Tour only $5 (£3.40); tastings $10–$27 (£6.80–£18). Tours daily 10:30am, 12:30 and 3:30pm.

Bodega J & E Lurton Two sons of a Bordeaux wine legend, Jacques and François have wineries around the world. Here in the Valle de Uco, their *bodega* is a wood, concrete, and stainless steel beauty that fits naturally into the environment. Their Pinot Gris is among the best in South America.

RP 94 Km 21, Vista Flores, Tunuyán. ✆ **262/249-2067.** www.bodegalurton.com. Reservations required. Tastings start at $10 (£6.80) Mon–Fri 10am–5pm.

Bodega La Azul ★★ For a very personalized look at a small boutique winery, visit La Azul. The grapes have to be very, very good to make it into their exclusive, high-quality selection of wines.

RP 89, Agua Amarga, Tupungato. ✆ **262/242-3593.** www.bodegalaazul.com.ar. Reservations recommended. Free tours; tastings $10 (£6.80) per person. Daily 8:30am–6pm.

Bodegas Salentein ★★ This complex is practically a planet of its own. It includes a modern chapel, the Posada inn (see above), the recently opened and much-heralded **Kiika art gallery ★**, a restaurant and gift shop, and, of course, the *bodega* itself. Kiika

with it many of the founding families of today's wineries, who carried new winemaking techniques and varietals from Italy, France, and Spain. A series of economic crises plagued the industry in the first half of the 19th century, and Mendoza's wines seldom made it farther than the common Argentine table. Some of the wines were so low in quality that soda water was needed to help wash them down, a tradition that continues in some places today, though not because the wine is of poor quality.

In the past decade, wine from Mendoza has reached well beyond the common table to the international stage. Argentina's National Wine Growing Institute has regulated the country's wine industry and spearheaded quality improvements, with increased focus on the international market. New production techniques, state-of-the-art machinery, foreign investment and expertise, advanced irrigation processes, and better grape varieties have combined to bring Mendoza international acclaim. The region's dry, sandy soil; low humidity; and rich sun combine to create wines of high alcohol content and rich fruity character, the most important of which is Malbec, characterized by a powerful fruit bouquet with sweet, dense tannins. Mendocine vineyards grow many other varietals, including cabernet sauvignon, tempranillo, bonarda, Syrah, Barbera, chardonnay, and sauvignon blanc.

blends mostly contemporary Argentine art with a bit of the (unnamed) owner's collection of Dutch classics. The exhibition room is ever-changing. Visits to the *bodega* start with a 15-minute film. Guests then walk across to the cross-shaped *bodega,* which eerily resembles a temple. You wouldn't be the only one who thought of *The Da Vinci Code* or James Bond while touring the underground. Tastings, like everything here, are dramatic. Come to Salentein for the day, and include lunch at the Posada.

RN 89 and Videla, Los Arboles, Tunuyán. ✆ **262/242-9000.** www.bodegasalentein.com. Reservations required. Tour with tasting $5 (£3.40) per person, includes entrance to gallery. Mon–Sat 10am–4pm.

Clos de los Siete/Monteviejo Led by the infamous and influential "flying winemaker" Michel Rolland, seven French wine investors, excited by the limitless possibilities to plant without restriction, make up the **Le Clos de los Siete.** Their property in Valle de Uco is divided into seven wine cellars. They'll help you appreciate the freedom that Mendoza affords the world's great winemakers, who elsewhere feel restricted and left to nature's mercy. A visit here will help you put Mendoza in perspective. For a splurge, ask them to uncork a bottle of the award-winning Clos de los Siete 2003 blend.

Clodomiro Silva s/n, Vista Flores. ✆ **262/242-2054.** www.monteviejo.com. Reservations required. Free tours; tasting prices range from $17–$47 (£12–£32). Daily 10am–5pm.

O. Fournier ★ This Spanish-owned company has a remarkable "concept *bodega*" that shows the power of gravity. It's this natural law that makes for outstanding, natural wine. Opened in 2006, the winery has stunned critics with its modern architecture and new

twist on technology. Given their Iberian roots, it's no surprise they have excellent Tempranillos. Their restaurant, Urban, is also getting its fair share of praises and has perhaps the best *bodega* lunch in Mendoza.

Los Indios, La Consulta, Tunuyán. ✆ **262/245-1579.** www.ofournier.com. Reservations required. Tour $5 (£3.40); tasting ($2.50–$8/£1.70–£5.40). Tour fee waived with purchase of wine or tasting. Daily 9:30am–5:30pm.

3 SAN RAFAEL

234km (145 miles) S of Mendoza

Sleepy and rural, San Rafael is a mini-Mendoza minus the hipsters. The main daily activities here include working in a winery, eating ice cream, and riding a bicycle. It's definitely off the beaten track; very, very few people coming to Mendoza actually make the journey. You'll need a car and a spirit of adventure to explore the area.

GETTING THERE

San Rafael is a 1½-hour drive south of Mendoza down Hwy. 40. The first half of the trip goes through lovely rural towns. The second half crosses a desert wasteland. Many buses leave Mendoza's main terminal heading for San Rafael. **Nueva Chevallier** (✆ **2627/446697**) and **Andesmar** (✆ **2627/427720**) are the main bus companies. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (✆ **0810/222-86527;** www.aerolineas.com.ar) flies five times a week (currently Mon–Fri only) from Buenos Aires to San Rafael.

GETTING AROUND

The town center is compact and easy to explore on foot. Rural areas will require either a *remise* (call Remises Del Sur, ✆ **2627/430646**), rental car, or bicycle. For rental cars, try **Hertz** (✆ **2627/436959;** www.hertz.com) or **Rent A Car San Rafael** (✆ **2627/437447;** www.rentacarsanrafael.com.ar).

San Rafael is flat, so biking is a great way to explore. To rent a bike, try **Biciletas Rosales** (✆ **2627/430147**) or **Bicicleteria Dapratto** (✆ **2627/427738**). Rates in San Rafael generally run about $10 (£6.80) for a day's rental.

There are many companies that offer transfers out to the fertile Valle Grande and Atuel River, including **Transportes Iselin** (✆ **2627/446463**), which departs from the bus terminal, and **Atuel Travel** (✆ **2627/429282**), which also organizes sightseeing and wine tours.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The municipal Tourism Information Office is at Av. H. Yrigoyen 745 (✆ **2627/424217;** www.sanrafaelturismo.gov.ar). It's open daily 8am to 9pm.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

In addition to the establishments listed below, don't miss **La Delicia Helados** (Yrigoyen and 3 de Febrero; ✆ **2627/436333**), which is great for people-watching and ice cream. A slightly hipper joint is **Sin Fondo,** Yrigoyen 1710 (✆ **2627/15-545553** [cell]), with a relatively broad menu for this town; pastas and seafood are the top draws. A classic neighborhood joint, **Tienda Del Sol,** Yrigoyen 1663 (✆ **2627/425022**), serves pizzas, homemade pastas, huge sandwiches, and *minutas*—breaded veal or chicken topped with a choice of ham, cheese, tomato, or all the above.

Casafuerte Posada Rural (Finds) A romantic, secluded inn outside San Rafael, this is the kind of get-away where time slows down. It's close to the waters of the nearby dikes. The rooms are all decorated simply with natural and clear colors, giving a warm feeling.

Las Heras 252 (corner of Chacabuco), Villa 25 de Mayo, San Rafael. ✆ **2627/495020.** www.posadacasafuerte.com.ar. 5 units. $125 (£85). No credit cards. **Amenities:** Pool; lounge; wine cellar; library. *In room:* No phone.

Rocas Amarillas Thirty beautiful kilometers (19 miles) from San Rafael is a sweet collection of new though rustic two-story cabins on the Atuel River in Valle Grande. Each cabin has a fully equipped kitchen, outdoor grill, and river views. The staff will help you set up adventures, from rafting to climbing.

RP 173, Km 33, Valle Grande. ✆ **2627/15-589285** (cell). www.rocas-amarillas.com.ar. 4 units. $45 (£30) cabin. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Grills; picnic area. *In room:* TV, kitchen.

Tower Inn & Suites In the center of town, the appropriately named Tower Inn is San Rafael's tallest building and only four-star hotel. Rooms are comfortable and fully equipped. The staff is friendly and professional. The kid-friendly Flintstone-style pool has a huge patio. The spa focuses on olive and olive-oil treatments.

Yrigoyen 774. ✆ **2627/427190.** www.towersanrafael.com. 89 units. From $145 (£98) double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; casino; gym; spa; game room; business center; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet, safe.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

San Rafael is an oasis irrigated by the Atuel and Diamante rivers. Your explorations will combine both the rivers themselves and the productive oasis they give life to—not to mention the local wineries, which make the most of a shallow mineral soil and a warm climate.

Bodegas

Bodega Jean Rivier This renovated winery blends old and new with flair and precision. The yield is small and strictly controlled. The owner considers himself a rare classic "grower-winemaker," who straddles what are generally considered separate tasks.

Yrigoyen 2385. ✆ **2627/432676.** www.jeanrivier.com. Free tour with tasting. Mon–Fri 8–11am and 3–5pm; Sat 8–11am.

Casa Bianchi ★ This traditional family winery is beloved by Argentines throughout the country and very much at the heart of San Rafael. Their modern *bodega* bears the fruits of grapes brought from Italy in 1910 by Mr. Bianchi himself. If you're lucky, you'll get a taste of the exquisite Enzo Bianchi Malbec. They also have a separate cellar that gives champagne-focused tours.

Comandante Torres 500. ✆ **2627/433046.** www.vbianchi.com. Free tour; $4 (£2.70) standard tastings; $9 (£6.10) deluxe tasting. Mon–Sat 9am–noon and 2–5pm.

Outdoor Adventures

San Rafael's bounty stems from the waters of the Atuel River, which local residents have long used as a playground. The road south from town leads through the scenic walls of the **Atuel Canyon.** The adventure scene is headquartered in the tranquil community of **Valle Grande** ★, which stretches along the river itself. Along the way, you'll find cabins for rent, horseback riding trips, rock climbing, and small restaurants. Many cater to large groups of students. For half-day rafting trips, try **Raffeish** (✆ **2627/436996**) or **Antu**

Aventuras ★ (✆ **2627/439069**). Upriver from Valle Grande are four imposing hydroelectric dams, and beyond that a massive reservoir called El Nihuil where there are boat rentals, restaurants, and beaches.

A new development southwest of San Rafael is **Finca Viña del Golf,** RN 144, Km 674 (✆ **2627/487027;** www.vinasdelgolf.com.ar), which combines a winery, 18-hole golf course, and a planned lodge.

4 THE ALTA MONTANA DRIVING CIRCUIT

Climbing the mountains on the way to the Chilean border, this excellent driving circuit leads past the magnificent vineyards of Mendoza to breathtaking vistas of the Andes. It is an all-day excursion (at least 5 hr. with no stops) that leads past the Uspallata Valley up to nearly 3,000m (9,840 ft.) at Las Cuevas and the entrance of Aconcagua Park. You can take one of two routes: The easier drive takes you past Potrerillos on the RN 7—a small area along the Mendoza River popular for its white-water rafting. The more challenging drive (due to winding dirt roads) takes you through the gorgeous natural-springs town of Villavicencio. (We recommend you go Villavicencio on the way and return via Potrerillos on the RN 7, since you don't want to be stuck above Villavicencio at night.) Whichever route you choose, the roads come together in Uspallata, where the circuit continues to Las Cuevas on the RN 7. You can do this tour on your own, but it is easier with a driver who knows the roads. Note that a 4WD is preferable, although not a necessity, for the route to Villavicencio. Expect temperatures to drop significantly as you climb the mountain; bring a sweater! It's also a nice idea to bring a picnic. In absence of any lovely restaurant for lunch on a terrace with a view of the peaks, a roadside pullout may be the better option.

HEADING TO USPALLATA VIA VILLAVICENCIO

Although it takes a couple hours longer than heading straight north on RN 7, driving the RN 52 takes you to the natural springs of Villavicencio, the source of Argentina's well-known mineral water. If you've ordered bottled water in Argentina, chances are it's Villavicencio. Leaving Mendoza to the north through Las Heras, you'll be driving on the old international road to Chile. After 34km (21 miles), you'll pass the **Monumento Canota,** the spot where generals San Martín and Las Heras split to confront the Spanish at different fronts in 1817. After Canota, you will begin to climb the Villavicencio Valley, and by 40km (25 miles), the road turns to gravel and becomes winding (the road here is known locally as the *Caracoles de Villavicencio,* or "the snails of Villavicencio"). A small **ranger station** at 50km (31 miles) offers information on the Villavicencio natural reserve, including sources of the mineral water and the region's flora and fauna. Eagles, condors, pumas, mountain cats, foxes, ostriches, guanacos, flowering cacti, and many plants and trees occupy the area.

VILLAVICENCIO

45km (28 miles) N of Mendoza

French-owned Danone purchased the rights to this land and its mineral water, and it is working hard to preserve the integrity of the springs. This explains why the **Hotel Termas Villavicencio,** frequented by Argentina's high society until its closing in 1980, has not reopened. The lush gardens of the Normandy-style hotel, seen on the label of Villavicencio

Roadside Shrines: Folk Saints of Argentina

At first they seem random. But take a closer look, and you'll discover that the roadside shrines dotted along this high mountain road (and along most rural roads in Argentina) are of two kinds: piles of clear water bottles and mazes of red ribbons. In fact, they are intriguing cultural phenomena worshiped by devoted cults, yet still unrecognized by the Catholic Church. The water bottles honor the **Difunta Correa,** considered by many to be worthy of sainthood and capable of performing miracles. During the civil wars of the 1840s, Señora Deolinda Correa followed her husband's battalion through the desert. Carrying water, food, and their baby son in her arms, she died en route of exhaustion, thirst, and hunger; but her baby survived by nursing on his dead mother's breasts. Believers, in particular truck drivers, leave bottles full of water to quench her thirst and ask for her protection, which she has been known to offer in abundance to those in need. There is an elaborate shrine in her honor in the town of Vallecito, in San Juan province. Meanwhile, the red ribbons pay tribute to one man: **El Gaucho Gil,** a mythical outlaw cowboy who was said to be a Robin Hood–type character and a conscientious objector to civil wars. In 1878, he was hung for his acts of defiance. Just before his last breath, he pledged that he'd become a miracle worker in the afterlife. Hundreds of thousands of Argentines pray to him for miracles, and he keeps them coming back, always leaving offerings in the color of blood. Just exactly why a Gaucho Gil shrine is located where it is remains a bit of a puzzle to nonfollowers, but many believe they are positioned where miracles have occurred—including narrowly avoided traffic accidents.

bottles on tables up and down the country, are off-limits. Perched against the dusty foothills with oaks and poplars, trickling streams, and wildflowers surrounding it, the hotel's location represents a lush little paradise in the Andes. A small chapel, opened in 1941, lies just behind it. Next to the hotel, you can stop at the Hostería Villavicencio for lunch or a drink.

THE USPALLATA VALLEY

Continuing along RN 52, you will follow the path that San Martín used for his liberation campaign. The dirt road zigzags its way up the canyon, dotted with silver mines exploited by the Spaniards in the 18th century. When you get 74km (46 miles) from Mendoza, you will have climbed to the 3,000m (9,840-ft.) summit. From here, you'll have a magnificent view of Aconcagua and the mountains, and the road begins to improve.

The road from the summit to Uspallata is a breathtaking 28km (17-mile) drive through the **Uspallata Valley.** You will descend into the valley through a small canyon, and when the valley emerges, you'll be treated to one of the most beautiful sights in Argentina. The polychromatic mountains splash light off Aconcagua to your left and the "Tiger Chain" ahead, with occasional clouds painting shadows on some mountains and allowing sun to pour light on others. The curious rock formations surrounding you were filmed for the dramatic setting of *Seven Years in Tibet,* starring Brad Pitt. Just before you

arrive in Uspallata, 2km (1¼ miles) north of town, you will see **Las Bovedas**—peculiar egg-shaped mud domes built in the 18th century to process gold and silver for the Spaniards.

HEADING TO USPALLATA VIA POTRERILLOS

This drive is significantly easier than the route through Villavicencio, taking you along the RN 7 through the Precordillera mountains. Follow the signs from downtown Mendoza that point to the republica de chile. Potrerillos is a bit of a ghost town along the Río Mendoza, where tour companies arrange white-water rafting, horseback riding, and trekking. There is a gas station here. **Argentina Rafting Expediciones** (see "Tour Operators & Outdoor Activities," on p. 274) has its adventure park off the RN 7. It's a great recharger. There is also a small restaurant. A few kilometers upriver, the new **Pueblo del Río Mountain Resort** ★ (✆ **261/424-6745;** www.pueblodelrio.com.ar) has rustic cabins built with stone and wood that sleep up to eight people each. They have fully equipped kitchens and outdoor grills, and costs $90 (£61) for two people. There's also a good restaurant. This is a great place to clear your head after trolling around the wineries, and the **Aires de Montaña Spa,** part of the resort, offers all the classic treatments to rejuvenate you. It is the nicest place to stay en route to Aconcagua. The drive continues 41km (25 miles) alongside the Mendoza River to Uspallata.

USPALLATA

58km (36 miles) N of Mendoza

With only 3,500 inhabitants (many of them members of the military), Uspallata is a pretty sleepy place. But this small Andean town surrounded by lovely poplar trees and the biggest mountains in the Americas offers a variety of outdoor activities and makes an excellent base from which to explore the mountains. You can obtain limited visitor information from the **tourist information booth,** open daily from 9:30am to 8:30pm, at the corner of RN 7 and RN 52. Gustavo Pizarro is the area's best tour guide, and his **Pizarro Expediciones,** RN 7 (✆ **2624/420003;** www.pizarroexpediciones.com.ar), organizes horseback riding, mountain biking, climbing, and white-water rafting tours. If you need gas or any supplies, get them in Uspallata, which is the last real town before the Chilean border.

Where to Stay & Dine

Hostería Los Condores Given the town's limited selection of lodgings, Los Condor is probably the best choice. This traditional small-town hotel's location is its best perk. It's steps away from the main intersection and the heart of town. Rooms come in a variety of setups, from simple square singles to large triples. All are bright and spacious, with large bathrooms. There's a rectangular pool outside, a big breakfast, and the staff is friendly.

Las Heras s/n, Uspallata. ✆ **2624/420002.** 23 units. $65 (£44) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool.

Parrillada San Cayetano ARGENTINE This *parrilla* is widely considered the best Argentine grill in town, serving large portions of standard classics such as young goat, chicken, and beef. Behind the YPF gas station, it's a favorite among truckers crossing the border. For $14 (£9.45), servers deliver to your table a small steaming grill loaded with a selection of various cuts. Homemade empanadas and pastas round out the options. The wine list isn't bad, either.

RN 7, Km 1105. ✆ **2624/420149.** Main courses $8–$14 (£5.40–£9.45). No credit cards. Daily noon–2am.

A Shared Backbone: Crossing into Chile

Trans-Andean neighbors, sometime rivals, colleagues, and "cousins," Chile and Argentina are intricately linked as nations. They share a 5,150km-long (3,193-mile) border from the high deserts of the north to the wilderness of Tierra del Fuego. The busiest border crossing is here at the Paso de Los Libertadores; these border posts are open 24 hours a day for most of the year. In winter, from May 15 to September 1, it's open from 8am to 8pm, or only when the road is open. From here, it's a steep and scenic 3-hour descent to the Chilean capital of Santiago.

HEADING TO ACONCAGUA FROM USPALLATA

Continuing along the RN 7, you'll drive through the wide U-shaped valley carved from ancient glaciers and loaded with minerals such as iron, sulfur, talc, and copper. As you climb the canyon, you will see on your left the first signs of the atrophying **Andes railway**—an old, narrow track from 1902 that lifted an early-20th-century steam train up the mountains. The railroad was abandoned in 1980, due to a political dispute between Chile and Argentina, but it received new vigor in 2006, when presidents Kirchner, of Argentina, and Bachelet, of Chile, agreed to start it running again. The $436-million project—necessitated by increased Argentine exportation and increased Chilean demand for imports—should be finished by 2010. The goal is to build a weatherproof line that won't be snowed out, as are hundreds of cargo trucks on this road each winter. No word yet if they will also implement a tourist service, for this is bound to be one of the world's most beautiful train tours.

When you get 20km (12 miles) from Uspallata, you'll come to **Puente Pichueta,** a stone bridge over the Pichueta River commissioned by Fernando VII in 1770 to allow messengers to cross from Argentina to Chile. The road leading to the bridge forms part of the old Inca trail. The lone tree beside the bridge is a nice picnic spot.

LOS PENITENTES

165km (102 miles) W of Mendoza

Los Penitentes is a small resort for downhill and cross-country skiing. Twenty-three slopes accommodate skiers of all levels, and a ski school instructs novices. Skiing is pricier but much better in Portillo, Chile (see below), but if you decide to stay in Los Penitentes, consider lodging at **Ayelan,** RN 7, Km 165 (✆ **261/427-1123**), across the street from the ski resort, with basic rooms looking toward the mountains. Doubles cost roughly $75 (£51), including breakfast, and the rustic dining room serves a limited selection of high-quality regional dishes. If you are in Mendoza in winter and like to ski, this makes a good day trip.

Note: Serious skiers with more time to ski or snowboard should make the trip to **Portillo** (www.skiportillo.com), a much larger and better-equipped resort across the Chilean border. Better yet, head south of Mendoza to Las Leñas (see below).

Hitting the Slopes in Las Leñas

One of South America's top ski destinations, **Las Leñas** ★ boasts 64km (40 miles) of runs, excellent snow, and typically small crowds. The summit reaches 3,430m (11,250 ft.), with a 1,230m (4,034-ft.) vertical drop. There are 30 runs, with approximately 8% set aside for beginners, 22% for intermediates, and 70% for advanced skiers. The resort's 11 lifts are getting seriously outdated, and there are loud calls for some infrastructure improvements. When the top lift shuts down (as it did for 2 of the season's 4 months in 2006, due to an avalanche), options for experts are limited. When all is running smooth, the lifts here can transport up to 9,200 skiers per hour, which is far more capacity than the town has in accommodations. Consequently, you seldom have to wait in line to get to the top, except during the crazy-busy weeks of Argentine national winter holidays, at the start of August.

Las Leñas is a destination resort—everyone comes on a package that usually includes 1 week of hotel accommodations, lessons, and lift tickets. It has one small grocery store, an interesting little museum and no nearby town to speak of. Essentially, you must eat all your meals out. It definitely has the feel of a winter wonderland, with no car traffic or high-rises, and hardly any trees. Because the climate is so dry, the powder snow is terrific. In season, it attracts wealthy Porteños and Argentine celebrities, as well as international skiers looking for extreme and challenging off-*piste* terrain, and it has an active nightlife in winter. Local ski instructors are excellent. The majority of people on the slopes are beginner/intermediates, which has historically left the advance terrain virtually untouched and ready for exploration. Today, the numbers of foreigners chasing extreme powder this way each year has grown substantially. Snow season runs from late June to mid-October. In summer (Dec–Feb), Las Leñas offers mountain biking, trekking, rafting, and fishing, and hotel prices drop significantly. The resort is most easily reached via a 90-minute flight from Buenos Aires to Malargüe, followed by a 1-hour bus to Las Leñas (68km/42 miles). Alternatively, you can travel by car or bus from Mendoza, which is a 4- to 5-hour drive (399km/247 miles).

The stylish new **Virgo Hotel and Spa** ★★ opened in 2005. It is a 105-room minimalist resort that has taken the lead as Las Leñas' best hotel, which definitely gives the resort something to celebrate. Rooms are spacious and bright.

PUENTE DEL INCA

6km (3¾ miles) W of Los Penitentes

Although it's become somewhat of a tacky tourist trap, the remarkable bridge **Puente del Inca** is nonetheless beautiful. First described in 1646 by the Spanish conquistadores, it's a natural stone bridge used by the Incas to cross the Río de las Cuevas, about 6km (3¾ miles) past Los Penitentes. With its beautiful display of natural colors, it is believed to have once been a bridge made of ice that was hardened by the thermal springs. Now it's holding a fragile balance between natural cementation and erosion. So it's off-limits to

Their quadruple rooms are a great value for larger groups. Bathrooms have a Zen-like simplicity with all natural elements and large showers. The spa is so nice you may not even want to hit the slopes, although with a lift just 15m (49 ft.) from the lobby, it's easy to start linking your turns.

In addition to housing the resort's casino, the 90-bedroom **Piscis Club Hotel** has well-equipped rooms that accommodate up to three people, though it's not quite the five-star hotel the sign proclaims. A stay here includes breakfast and dinner. Like most of the lodgings here, it is ski-in, ski-out. Following a day of skiing, the hotel provides hot drinks and warming by the fireplace, and the indoor pool, Jacuzzi, and sauna should reinvigorate the remaining cold parts of your body. The restaurant, **Las Cuatros Estaciones,** is the best around. All the hotels offer ski instruction and children's activities, as well as adult activities in the casino and night club. After a siesta and then a late dinner, swing by **La Cueva del Esquiador** wine bar and sample from a long and impressive wine list. They have special tastings of Mendozan wine throughout the ski season. As vibrant in the evening as it is on snowy winter days, the place hosts night skiing three times a week and regular concerts, parties, and events.

Las Leñas lies in the southwest of Mendoza province, near the city of Malargüe and close to the Chilean border. To drive from Mendoza, take the RN 40 to the PR 222. Most bookings are done online at www.laslenas.com. **PowderQuest** (www.powderquest.com) offers packages popular with North Americans and Europeans. A 7-night package includes flights from Buenos Aires and excellent guided English-language ski tours with guides who know the mountain fantastically well. They'll also include a few days of wine touring in Mendoza before or after.

Lift tickets run about $60 (£41) per day, with multiday passes available. A weekly pass, for example, will run you $305 (£207). Prices for lifts, as well as those for accommodations, depend on the time of the season. September is generally a great time to come—fewer crowds, cheaper prices, and longer days. Great last-minute end-of-season promotions are available as well.

visitors—you can look at it, but you can't walk on it. Under the bridge, you will see the remains of an old spa that once belonged to a hotel, built in 1917 to capitalize on the thermal springs. That hotel was destroyed in an avalanche in 1965, but, in what many consider a miracle, the adjacent church went unscathed. Natural hot springs still flow underground here, but access is closed to the public. Near the spa, vendors sell handicrafts. **Hostería Puente del Inca** (✆ **261/429-9953**) is the best place to eat here. It's a bit stuffy and seems to be trapped in the 1950s, but the set menu is reliable and well priced at $12 (£8.20).

PARQUE PROVINCIAL ACONCAGUA

Just after Puente del Inca, you will come to the entrance of **Aconcagua Provincial Park.** At 6,960m (22,829 ft.), Cerro Aconcagua is the "Roof of the Americas"—the highest peak not just in South America, but also in the entire Western Hemisphere. From RN 7, you can see the summit on clear days. For a great look at it, get out of the car at the parking lot on the north side of the highway and hike the 15 minutes to Laguna Los Horcones (there is another stellar view from Km 34 on the road btw. Uspallata and Villavicencio). First climbed in 1897, it is a challenging, although not overly technical, climb, where your body battles the stresses of high altitude in an extreme environment. Only highly experienced climbers should even think about this as a goal—it requires fitness, strength, and endurance, as well as a certified local guide. Most people take over 2 weeks to climb, giving themselves at least 1 week to acclimatize to the altitude before pushing for the top. The south face, which gets little sun, is the most treacherous climb. The normal route is along the west side. The main climbing season is in January and February, when dozens of expeditions from around the world converge to tackle one of the prized Seven Summits. The rest of the year, the park is virtually deserted.

The provincial park includes 71,000 hectares (175,441 acres) of stunning high-mountain country tucked on the eastern side of the border between Chile and Argentina. To enter the park, however, you must first obtain a permit from the park's "attention center," called Edificio Cuba (✆ **261/425-2031;** www.aconcagua.mendoza.gov.ar), inside Mendoza's Parque San Martín. The location where you can buy permits changes periodically, so check with Mendoza's tourism office for additional details. Permits for 2, 7, and 20 days are available. With one of the shorter-duration permits, you can hike to the base camps without climbing to the summit.Those hoping to reach the top must buy a 20-day permit, which costs $500 (£339; including emergency medical insurance) in high season. The top guiding company in the park is **Fernando Grajales Expediciones** (✆ **800/516-6962** or 261/15-500-7718 [cell]; www.grajales.net), which offers 3-day hikes as well as 19-day summit attempts. Another recommended outfitter is **Aconcagua Trek** (✆ **261/431-2000;** www.rudyparra.com). Also try **Aymara Adventures & Expeditions** (✆ **261/420-2064;** www.aymara.com.ar), which has horseback-riding trips in the provincial park.

After visiting the park, if you have time to go a bit farther and still make it back to Mendoza before too late, continue on to the official border point. At 4,000m (13,120 ft.) above sea level, it's a wild and woolly place. The famous towering bronze monument Cristo Redentor was erected by the neighboring nations in 1902 after they resolved a territorial dispute. Then return to Mendoza via Potrerillos on the RN 7.

11

The Argentine Lake District

by Christie Pashby

With its tall peaks and crystalline waters, the Argentine Lake District is one of the world's most spectacular mountain playgrounds, yet it is remarkably unknown and unexplored by foreigners.

The region stretches from the rugged, Wild West town of Junín de los Andes in the north to the emerald waters of Cholila in the south. In between, cottage-lined towns are scattered about, affording plenty of options for overnight stops. A range of travelers will find something of interest here—alpine adventures, aquatic sports, fabulous wine and cuisine, and cozy chalets and hotels.

Argentines flock here during their twice-annual holidays—to ski in July and August, and to raft in the lakes and hike the mountains in January. The rest of the year, it's *tranquilísimo.* I suggest you schedule your visit when the locals are back at work, during the shoulder-season months of November (spring) and March (autumn)—my favorite time to visit here.

For more information about the region, see **www.interpatagonia.com**.

EXPLORING THE REGION

In this chapter, I have focused both on the Lake District's principal destinations—San Carlos de Bariloche (known here simply as Bariloche), Villa La Angostura, and San Martín de los Andes—as well as stops off the beaten path, such as El Bolsón and Junín de los Andes. This coverage includes numerous national parks, as well as driving tours and boat trips that take in the best of the stunning lakeside scenery. I recommend basing yourself in one of these towns and striking out from there to explore the surrounding wilderness. All the towns described in this chapter offer enough outdoor and sightseeing excursions to fill 1 or even 2 weeks, but 4 to 5 days in one location is ample time for a visit. Based in Bariloche, you can take a day trip south to the crafts fair and lakes at El Bolsón, and then head out for daytime adventures in Nahuel Huapi National Park. Then, take 2 nights to visit San Martín de los Andes and Villa la Angostura. If you're up for it, don't miss the chance to sleep in the backcountry—in either a rustic high-mountain hut, a fly-fishing lodge, or a simple tent, after you've taken in the scenery on horseback. Another interesting route is to make a detour into Chile via the lake crossing from Bariloche, or to organize a boat-bus combination that loops from Bariloche and Villa La Angostura in Argentina, then crosses the border into Chile, then stops in Puyehue, continuing south to Puerto Varas or Puerto Montt, and finally crosses back into Argentina and Bariloche via the Lake Crossing. Another option is to cross from San Martín de los Andes to Pucón, Chile.

1 SAN CARLOS DE BARILOCHE ★★

1,621km (1,005 miles) SW of Buenos Aires; 180km (112 miles) S of San Martín de los Andes

Just mention Bariloche to an Argentine, and you'll inspire a whimsical sigh. Officially known as San Carlos de Bariloche, this city represents the good life in the national consciousness. With stunning natural scenery and fine cuisine, it's a winter and summer playground for vacationing Argentines, and it's practically a rite of passage for Argentine youth to explore nature in the Nahuel Huapi National Park here, with Bariloche in the middle.

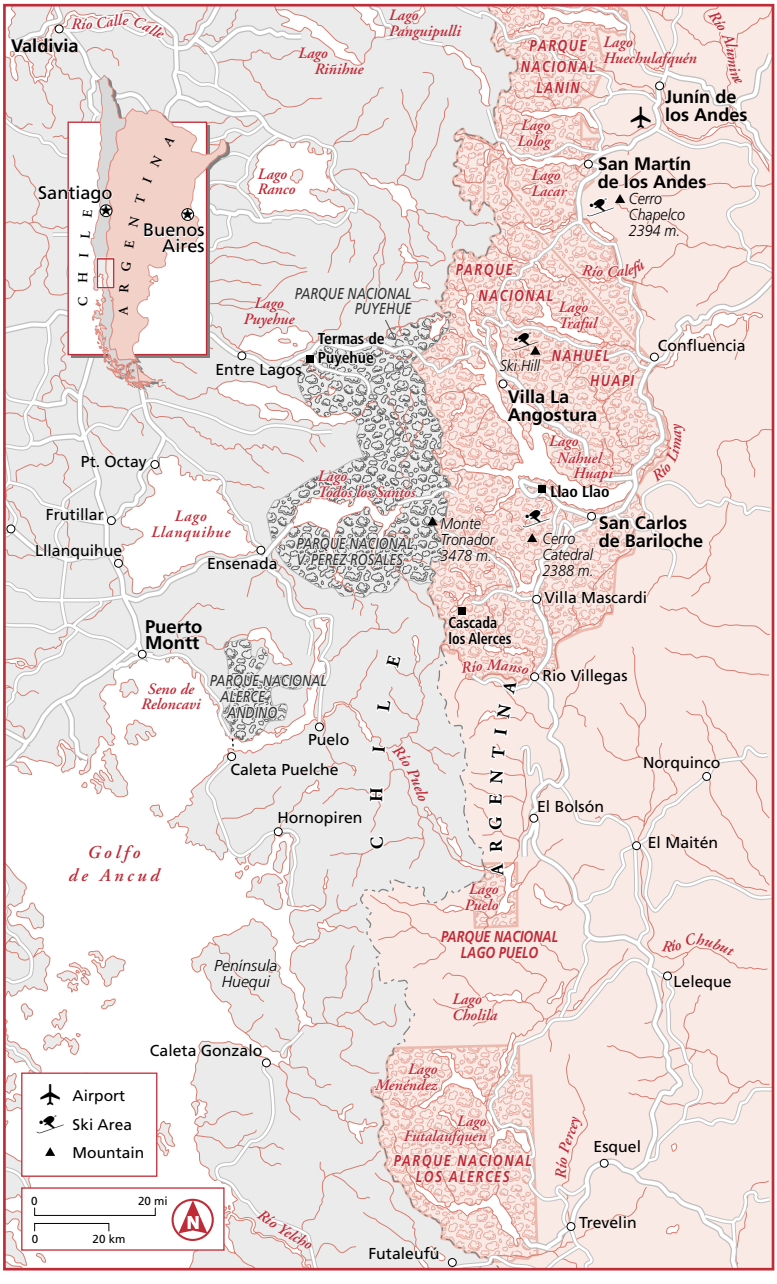
Bariloche is blessed with a strategic geographic position. With the rugged plains of the Patagonian Steppe to the east, the towering snowy peaks of the Andes to the west, and the glistening and grand Nahuel Huapi Lake in front, opportunities for adventure are abundant. Even if you're not much of an adventurer, you'll still find plenty of pleasant sightseeing tours, boat trips, boutiques, driving excursions, and fine dining to keep you busy. Or just park yourself wherever the view is good and soak it all in.

The city itself embodies a strange juxtaposition: an urban city plopped down in the middle of beautiful wilderness. Unfortunately, Argentine migrants fleeing Buenos Aires, an ever-growing tourism industry, and 2 decades of unchecked development have left a cluttered mess in what was once an idyllic mountain town. Bits and pieces of the charming architecture influenced by German, Swiss, and English immigration are still in evidence, but *"el centro"* of Bariloche can be tacky and chaotic. Visitors to Bariloche are sometimes overwhelmed by its hodgepodge of ugly apartment buildings and clamorous discos, and the crowds that descend on this area from mid-December until the end of February and again during ski season in July. A visit to Bariloche, however, does not necessarily mean staying in (or spending hardly any time) in the city's core. Your best bet is to spend less time in town, and more on the lake or in the mountains. Drive 10 minutes outside town, and you'll be surrounded again by thick forests, rippling lakes, and snowcapped peaks that rival the Alps. If you're looking for a quiet vacation, you'd be better off lodging outside the city center, on the road to the Llao Llao Peninsula or in the town of Villa La Angostura (p. 327). On the flip side, Bariloche offers a wealth of services, including the area's largest and best-serviced airport.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

BY PLANE The **Aeropuerto Bariloche** (✆ **02944/426162**) is 13km (8 miles) from downtown. Buses to the city center line up outside the arrival area; they're roughly scheduled to coordinate with flight arrivals. A taxi to the center costs about $15 (£10)—a bargain if you have a group of two or three people. **Aerolíneas Argentinas,** Mitre 185 (✆ **02944/422548;** www.aerolineas.com.ar), runs at least three daily flights from Buenos Aires; in summer, it operates two daily flights from El Calafate as well. **LAN,** Mitre 534 (✆ **800/999-9526;** www.lan.com), runs two or three flights a day from Buenos Aires. **Lineas Aéreas del Estado,** Quaglia 238, #8 (✆ **02944/423562;** www.lade.com.ar), serves small destinations in the area such as Neuquen and Esquel. It's nearly impossible to make it to Bariloche from North America or Europe in a day, as you must change airports in Buenos Aires. As of 2008, the Brazilian airline **TAM** (✆ **888/235-9826;** www.tam.com.br) has twice-weekly flights from Sao Paolo.


Río Calle Calle
Valdivia
Lago Panguipulli
Lago Riñihue
PARQUE NACIONAL LANIN
Lago Huechulafquén
Río Alumine
Junín de los Andes
Lago Lolog
Lago Lacar
San Martín de los Andes
Cerro Chapelco 2394 m.
Lago Ranco
CHILE
ARGENTINA
Santiago
Buenos Aires
PARQUE NACIONAL PUYEHUE
Lago Puyehue
Termas de Puyehue
Entre Lagos
PARQUE NACIONAL
Río Caleufú
Lago Traful
NAHUEL HUAPI
Ski Hill
Confluencia
Villa La Angostura
Lago Nahuel Huapi
Río Limay
Pt. Octay
Frutillar
Lago Llanquihue
Llanquihue
Ensenada
Lago Todos los Santos
PARQUE NACIONAL V. PEREZ ROSALES
Monte Tronador 3478 m.
Llao Llao
Cerro Catedral 2388 m.
San Carlos de Bariloche
Villa Mascardi
Cascada los Alerces
Puerto Montt
Río Manso
Río Villegas
Seno de Reloncavi
PARQUE NACIONAL ALERCE ANDINO
Puelo
Río Puelo
Caleta Puelche
Norquinco
El Bolsón
Hornopiren
El Maitén
Golfo de Ancud
Lago Puelo
PARQUE NACIONAL LAGO PUELO
Río Chubut
Península Huequi
Leleque
Lago Cholila
Caleta Gonzalo
Lago Menéndez
Lago Futalaufquen
PARQUE NACIONAL LOS ALERCES
Río Percey
Esquel
Trevelin
Río Yelcho
Futaleufú
Airport
Ski Area
Mountain
0
20 mi
0
20 km

Traveling by Boat to Chile

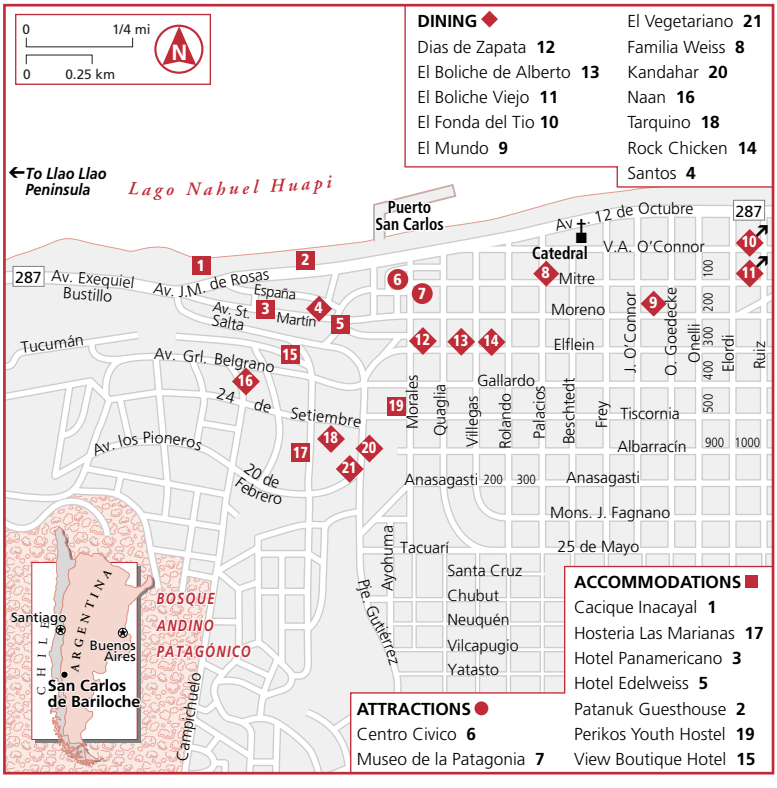
Cruce Andino is the name of the company now running the spectacular lake-crossing journey from Bariloche over the border (and the Andes Mountains) to the Chilean Lake District. It's a boat-and-bus combination that terminates in Lago Todos los Santos, near Ensenada and Puerto Varas, although it can also be done in reverse, from Chile to Bariloche. If you're planning to visit Chile, it's a superb option that allows you to take in the beauty of the Andes and the volcanoes, rivers, and waterfalls in the mountain range. I don't recommended making this journey during heavy rain. The trip can take 1 long day or 2 days, with an overnight in the Hotel Peulla or the recommended Hotel Natura in Chile. The 1-day trip costs $230 (£156) per person for the boat trip (including lunch), and an average of $310 (£211) per person based on double occupancy for an overnight at the Hotel Natura in Peulla, Chile. Book at any travel agency or from Cruce Andino's offices in Bariloche (✆ **02944/425444;** www.cruceandino.com).

BY BUS The **Terminal de Omnibus** (✆ **02944/432860**) is at Av. 12 de Octubre 2400; a dozen companies serve most major destinations in Argentina and Chile. **Via TAC** (✆ **02944/434727**) schedules three daily arrivals from Buenos Aires and daily service from El Bolsón, Esquel, Mendoza, and Córdoba. **Vía Bariloche** (✆ **02944/432444**) has eight daily arrivals from Buenos Aires (the trip lasts about 20 hr.) and one daily trip from Mar del Plata. **Andesmar** (✆ **02944/430211**) has service from Mendoza, Río Gallegos, and Neuquén, and service from Osorno, Valdivia, and Puerto Montt in Chile. For long trips, opt for the slightly more expensive (usually $15/£10 more) *coche cama* or supercama for chairs that practically become beds. In addition, there are a few daily buses from San Martín de los Andes via the scenic Siete Lagos (Seven Lakes) route (only during the summer); from Villa La Angostura, try **Ko-Ko** (✆ **02944/431135**).

BY CAR Motorists can reach Bariloche from San Martín via several picturesque routes. The 200km (124-mile) scenic **Siete Lagos route,** from San Martín de los Andes, follows rutas 234, 231, and 237 (avoid this route when it's raining, as the dirt roads turn to mud). The 160km (99-mile) **Paso Córdoba** follows rutas 234, 63, and 237. The safest route for night driving or crummy weather, the **Collón Curá** runs 260km (161 miles) along rutas 234, 40, and 237; it's the longest route, but it's entirely paved. To get to El Bolsón, follow RN 258 south; continue down 40 to get to Esquel. To cross into Chile, take the Puyehue Pass via RN 231 (through Villa La Angostura); during periods of heavy snowfall, chains are required. The drive from Buenos Aires will take you upwards of 20 hours, and there are few pit stops en route. Driving here from Buenos Aires, or similarly far destinations such as El Calafate and Mendoza, is not recommended.

Getting Around

BY FOOT The city is compact enough to explore on foot. Most visitors spend just a few hours touring the city, however, and then use it as a base for exploring the region. The main streets for shopping and tourist agencies are Mitre and San Martín/Moreno. The center of town is the scenic Centro Cívico (Civic Center) plaza. From here, distances



are measured in kilometers to the east or west. While you may be tempted to try to walk into town along the lakeside road, it's a very busy street that isn't very enjoyable for walking; better to hop in a taxi or take the bus.

BY CAR Most savvy travelers rent a car to visit this area. You'll need wheels if you're staying outside the city center or planning to explore the sinuous roads that pass through exceptionally scenic landscapes such as the Cirquito Chico. All travel agencies offer bus excursions to these areas, which is another way to see them if you don't drive. Rental agencies, such as Budget, Dollar, Hertz, and Avis, have kiosks at the airport as well as a number of downtown offices: **Budget,** Mitre 106 (✆ 02944/422482); **AI Rent a Car,** Av. San Martín 127 (✆ 02944/436041); **Dollar,** Villegas 282 (✆ 02944/430333); **Hertz,** Quaglia 165 (✆ 02944/423457); **Bariloche Rent a Car,** Moreno 115 (✆ 02944/427638); and **Localiza,** V.A. O'Connor 602 (✆ 02944/435374). Rates are reasonable, starting at around $55 (£37) per day. Driving west of town, you have two options: the direct **Pioneros** road that locals use, a few blocks uphill from the lake, or **Bustillo,** the lakeside road. Distances, and addresses, are measured in kilometers west from the Civic Center.

Tips Bringing a Car into Chile

If you're hoping to do a Lake District circuit combining both the Argentine and Chilean lake districts, be warned that you'll need additional insurance and written permission from the car-rental agency to take the vehicle across the border. If you are planning to drive back to Argentina, you'll have no problems but you will need special papers. Few agencies, however, will allow you to leave the car in Chile. I suggest using Budget or Avis for these trips: They're the only companies with offices in numerous towns in both countries; they can offer roadside assistance, and they can quickly provide you with a replacement car if you run into problems. ***Note:*** The passes into Chile require chains in wintertime.

BY BUS Bariloche's public bus system is cheap and efficient, whether you're heading to the Cerro Catedral ski resort or exploring the lakeside route of the Circuito Chico. Regular buses depart from Calle San Martín, just in front of the National Park headquarters, or from Moreno and Palacios. Bus no. 20 follows the shores of Lago Nahuel Huapi past the Campanario chairlift to the Llao Llao Hotel & Resort. Bus no. 10 does the same route but continues past the village at Colonia Suiza. Bus no. 50 will take you directly to Cerro Catedral, and snowboards and skis are allowed onboard. Rides cost less than $1.50 (£1; just ask the driver).

When navigating the streets of Bariloche, be aware that two streets have similar names, though they are distinct routes: V.A. O'Connor runs parallel to the Costanera, and J. O'Connor bisects it.

Visitor Information

The **Secretaría de Turismo,** in the stone-and-wood Civic Center complex between calles Urquiza and Panzoni (✆ **02944/426784;** secturismo@bariloche.com.ar), has general information about Bariloche and is an indispensable resource for accommodations listings, especially during the high season. They also operate an information stand in the bus terminal, open Monday through Friday from 8am to 9pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 9pm. Useful tourism information, as well as the best maps and local books, are available at an information kiosk at the corner of Villegas and Moreno, next to the Artisan Market (no phone).

Good websites for all sorts of up-to-date travel information include **www.bariloche.org** and **www.interpatagonia.com**.

The **Club Andino Bariloche,** Av. 20 de Febrero 30 (✆ **02944/422266;** fax 02944/424579; www.clubandino.com.ar), provides excellent information about hiking, backpacking, and mountaineering in the area. They sell maps and provide treks and mountain ascents led by guides from the Club Andino; they are open daily from 9am to 1pm and 6 to 9pm during winter, daily from 8:30am to 3pm and 5 to 9pm during summer. This is an essential stop for those heading into the mountains. For general information about **Nahuel Huapi National Park,** head to the park's headquarters across the street from the Civic Center (✆ **02944/423111**), open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 12:30pm.

Fast Facts Bariloche

Banks & Currency Exchange Most banks exchange currency, including **Banco de Galicia,** Moreno and Quaglia (✆ **02944/427125**), and **Banco Frances,** San Martín 332 (✆ **02944/430315**). Banks close at 1pm, but have 24-hour ATMs outside. Try also **Cambio Sudamérica,** Mitre 63 (✆ **02944/434555**).

Hospital **Hospital Privado Regional** is located at 20 de Febrero 594 (✆ **02944/423074**).

Internet Access Internet cafes are on just about every corner—and almost every hotel has Internet access, which is usually free for guests. Try **CyberFirenza,** Quaglia 262, Loc. 20 (✆ **02944/422038**), or **Net & Cappuccino,** Quaglia 220 (✆ **02944/426128**). The cost is less than $2 (£1.35) per hour.

Laundry There are two reliable laundromats here: **Mileo,** at Villegas 145 (✆ **02944/422331**), and **Lavadero Huemul,** on Juramento 36 (✆ **02944/522067**).

Pharmacy The three main pharmacies in the city center are **Angel Gallardo,** A. Gallardo 701 (✆ **02944/427023**); **Zona Vital,** Moreno and Rolando (✆ **02944/420752**); and **Nahuel,** Moreno 238 (✆ **02944/422490**).

Police For emergencies, dial **101.** For other matters, call ✆ **02944/423434.**

Post Office The central post office (no phone) is in the Civic Center, next to the tourist office.

WHAT TO SEE & DO IN BARILOCHE

Bariloche's **Civic Center,** Avenida Juan Manuel de Rosas and Panzoni, is a charming stone-and-wood complex that houses most municipal offices and tourism services, such as the information center and national park headquarters. The complex, built in 1940, was inspired by the architecture of Bern, Switzerland. Here you'll find the **Museo de la Patagonia Perito Moreno** (✆ **02944/422309**), open Tuesday through Friday from 10am to 12:30pm and 2 to 7pm, and Saturday from 10am to 5pm. Admission is $3 (£2). The museum has five salons dedicated to the natural science, history, and ethnography of the Bariloche region. The well-tended displays here are intriguing, notably the stuffed and mounted local fauna, such as *pudú* (miniature deer), puma, condor, and more. The second floor has displays of Mapuche artifacts such as weapons, art, and jewelry, and other artifacts from the colonial period. A small gift shop sells postcards, books, and crafts.

SHOPPING You'll find everything and anything along Bariloche's main street, Mitre, including shops selling souvenirs and Argentine products such as *mate* (tea), gourds, and leather goods. For the region's famous smoked meats and cheese, and other regional specialties such as trout pâté, try the renowned **Familia Weiss,** Mitre 360 (✆ 02944/424829), or **Del Turista,** Av. San Martín 252 or Mitre 239 (✆ 02944/422124). Del Turista also has an enormous array of chocolates and candy, as do other confectioneries up and down Calle Mitre, such as **Abuela Goye,** Mitre 258 (✆ 02944/433861), and Quaglia 221 (✆ 02944/422276); **Mexicana,** Mitre 288 (✆ 02944/422505); and **Mamuschka** ★, Mitre 298 (✆ 02944/423294). Stop by the Information Center in the Civic Center (see above) for a map of Avenida Bustillo and the Llao Llao Peninsula,

What's with All the Chocolate?

Bariloche is a chocolate-lover's heaven. Within 3 blocks on the main drag, Calle Mitre, dozens of chocolate shops offer tasty little morsels of artisan chocolate. The industry sprang from early Swiss pioneers who settled at the nearby village of Colonia Suiza and saw the potential in all those healthy cows. Classic local flavors include *dulce de leche*, chocolate with lemon, and chocolate with local berries. All the shops are quite good and produce high-quality chocolate, but the constant lines in **Mamuschka,** Mitre 298 (✆ **02944/423294**), attest to the fact that this shop sells the absolute best chocolate in town. It's worth waiting your turn for the cute red boxes of delicious treats. Mamuschka also has a nice smoke-free cafe inside, and a branch at the base of Cerro Catedral ski resort. (Take note of the colorful tile work, by a local artist, on the sidewalk when you walk into Mamuschka.)

which are lined with dozens of shops selling regional specialties. One of the nicest for lovely home furnishings and accents is **El Coihue,** at Bustillo Km 15.5 (✆ 02944/448623). Also try the charming tiny shop **Los Juncos,** Bustillo Km 20 (✆ 02944/448107).

For local handicrafts predominantly made of wood and wool, stroll the **outdoor artisan market** ★ behind the Centro Civico, held each afternoon except Tuesdays and Wednesdays, from noon to 8pm (depending on the time of year). It's also worth checking out the indoor **artisan market** on Moreno between Quaglia and Villegas, which is open daily from 11am to 8pm. There is a small shop of all-natural wool products run by a local Mapuche indigenous group. All the vendors are friendly.

Tour Operators

A plethora of travel agencies offer everything under the sun along the streets of Bariloche. Most tours do not include lunch, and all charge extra for a bilingual guide. The best of the lot includes **Travelideas,** Villegas 316 (✆ **02944/424659**; www.travelideas.com.ar), and **Limay Travel,** V.A. O'Connor 710 (✆ **02944/420268;** www.limaytravel.com.ar). Both offer a wide variety of land excursions to El Bolsón, Cerro Tronador, and circuit sightseeing routes. **Huala Adventure Tourism,** San Martín 86 (✆ **02944/522438;** www.huala.com.ar), specializes in adventure sports such as white-water rafting, trekking, and horseback riding, as well as creative and fun multiday outings that combine activities. They can also help with car rentals and hotel accommodations.

PARQUE NACIONAL NAHUEL HUAPI ★★

Nahuel Huapi is Argentina's oldest and most popular national park, with a range of activities for any fitness level. It stretches from the Seven Lakes Road in the north to the Manso River in the south. The park also surrounds the city of Bariloche, and its headquarters are downtown in the Civic Center (see "Visitor Information," above). The park's main feature is the 3,500m (11,480-ft.) extinct volcano **Tronador (Thunderer),** named for the rumbling produced by ice falling from the mountain's peak. But the park is also known for its glacial-formed Lake Nahuel Huapi (the largest of more than a dozen lakes), as well as its lovely forested peninsulas and its waterways, which are often compared to the channels of southern Chilean Patagonia or the fiords of Norway. During

summertime, visitors can take part in day hikes or backpacking trips, with many trails to choose from, or boat out to one of the lake's islands. The park also has plenty of other outdoor activities such as rafting, horseback riding, and fishing; during the winter, the park's other dominant peak, **Cerro Catedral,** is a popular ski resort. Easy access to all regions of the park makes Nahuel Huapi popular with visitors seeking mellowest activities, such as sightseeing drives and chairlifts to magnificent lookout points. The following information applies to all attractions within Nahuel Huapi and around Bariloche.

THE ROAD TO THE LLAO LLAO PENINSULA ★★★

The **Cerro Campanario** ★ provides possibly the best lookout point in the region, with exceptional views of Nahuel Huapi and Perito Moreno lakes, as well as the ravishing beauty of the Llao Llao Peninsula and the peaks surrounding it. The lookout point is accessed by a 7-minute chairlift ride located 18km (11 miles) outside Bariloche on the road to Llao Llao, meaning you'll have to arrange transportation with a tour, drive a rental car, or take the local bus no. 20, which departs from behind the Centro Civico on Calle San Martín. A restaurant here offers panoramic views. The office is at Belgrano 41, #B (✆ **02944/427274**), open daily from 9am to noon and from 2 to 6pm; the cost for the chairlift is $6 (£4.05), and you don't need reservations. Just show up at the chairlift at Avenida Bustillo, Km 17.5, during operating hours. You can also hike up a dusty trail for free.

The Cerro Campanario is along a popular 60km (37-mile) drive around the Llao Llao Peninsula, commonly known as the **Circuito Chico** ★★. This drive affords spectacular views of Nahuel Huapi and Perito Moreno lakes and the snowcapped peaks of Cerro Lopez, Capilla, and Catedral, which tower over the water. Head west out of town on the lakeside Avenida Bustillo. At 18km (11 miles) from Bariloche, the route changes into Ruta 237, loops around the peninsula as Ruta 77, and meets back at Ruta 237 and eventually Bustillo, all the while meandering through dense forest and picturesque bays with outstanding lookout points. There are short hikes en route as well, including a trail through an enchanting *arrayán* (myrtle) forest at the Parque Municipal Llao Llao, and a trail out to the hidden Lago Escondido. Visitors will find *parrilla* (grill) and fondue-style restaurants along the way, as well as the world-renowned **Llao Llao Hotel & Resort** (p. 318). Overlooking the hotel, the lovely **Capilla San Eduardo chapel** ★ displays the unique rustic Andean architecture that so typifies Bariloche. In front of the Llao Llao, **Puerto Pañuelo** is the main dock for boat trips (see below), as well as trips to Puerto Blest and the boat crossing to Chile. Past the Llao Llao, the Ruta 77 continues to a lookout below Cerro Lopez and then descends to Bahía Lopéz, which has a nice beach

Nah-Well What?

You're not the only one who has trouble pronouncing the name of Bariloche's stunning lake and national park, **Nahuel Huapi**—that's *nah*-well *wah*-pee. It means Island of the Tiger in the native Mapuche language. With 524 sq. km (204 sq. miles), this stunning lake is more like an inland sea, connecting the lush forests and high peaks of the Andes with the rugged plains of the Patagonian Steppe.

and is the trail head for a 45-minute hike out to the tip of **Brazo Tristeza,** another large, lovely arm of Nahuel Huapi Lake. Next along the road is the trail head for the hike up to the Refugio Lopez hut, where there is also a snack bar. Farther along, be sure to stop for a photo op at the incredibly picturesque Punto Panorámico. Stop by the tourist information center in town to pick up a detailed Circuito Chico map highlighting restaurants and shops along the way. Again, most tour operators offer this excursion as a bus tour. Another option is to take the local bus along this route, hopping off and on in accordance with the hourly schedule (the tourist information office can also give you a bus schedule).

CERRO OTTO

Walk, bike, drive, or ride a gondola to the top of **Cerro Otto** for sweeping views of Lake Nahuel Huapi, the Llao Llao Peninsula, and the high peaks of Catedral and Tronador. It's the hill closest to town. Popular local pastimes include paragliding, trekking, rock climbing, and, during the winter, skiing, tobogganing, and dog sledding. To walk (2–3 hr.) or bike, take Avenida Los Pioneros for about 1km (about 1/2 mile) and follow the signs to Cerro Otto or Piedras Blancas. Or take the free shuttle bus that leaves from Mitre and Villegas; it runs daily every hour from 10:30am to 4:30pm and drops you off at the gondola base. The **gondola ride** (✆ **02944/441035**) costs $15 (£10) per person and runs January through February and July through August daily from 9:30am to 6pm; the rest of the year, it runs daily from 10am to 6pm. At the top of the summit, you'll also find a revolving restaurant (✆ **02944/441035**). The view here is not as nice as that at Campanario (above) and it's definitely more civilized and less wild. If you are staying out near the Llao Llao, better to avoid Otto altogether in favor of Cerro Campanario.

COLONIA SUIZA ★

Don't miss the quaint Swiss pioneer village at Colonia Suiza, out on the Circuito Chico, for their twice-weekly *curanto* cook-ups—a centuries-old style of cooking meat and vegetables deep in the ground. Both a lesson and a delight, *curantos* are held on Wednesdays and Sundays at the main plaza in Colonia Suiza. Founded in 1895 by the Swiss Goye and Mermaud families, who crossed into the area from Chile, this is also where Bariloche's chocolate industry was born. It's a tranquil little hamlet with a few restaurants and good campgrounds.

For more local driving tours, see "South of Bariloche," later in this chapter.

BOAT EXCURSIONS

Several boat excursions run from Puerto San Carlos or Puerto Pañelo at Llao Llao. Cost fluctuates between $30 and $50 (£20–£34) per person; to obtain exact prices for any of the following trips and to make a reservation, stop by any travel agency or call ✆ **02944/426784** for more information.

An enjoyable full-day excursion takes you to **Isla Victoria** and the **Bosque Arrayanes** (see also "Villa La Angostura," later in this chapter) by boat from Puerto Pañuelo. The excursion begins with a 30-minute sail to Isla Victoria, a giant midlake island, where passengers can disembark for a walk through a conifer forest or ascend to a lookout point atop Cerro Bella Vista via chairlift. The second stop is Península Quetrihué and the Bosque Arrayanes, famous for its concentration of the unusual terra-cotta-colored *arrayán* tree. This handsome "tree" is really a bush, with an odd, slick trunk that is cool to the touch. The peninsula can also be accessed from Villa La Angostura (see below).

From Puerto Pañuelo to Isla Victoria, trips leave at 10am and return at 5:30pm. Book via Cau-Cau, Mitre 139 (✆ **2944/431372;** www.islavictoriayarrayanes.com).

Another boat trip heads to **Puerto Blest** at the far west of Nahuel Huapi Lake, sailing through classic fiords and exuberant vegetation known as the Valdivian Forest. From this point, there is a lovely hike up to a wide cascade and peaceful mountain lake, with a giant *alerce* tree next door that's more than 1,200 years old. Visitors can dine at the restaurant at Puerto Blest or can bring a picnic lunch. These trips are very crowded in the summer. An interesting alternative is to hire a private hiking or naturalist guide (see "Outdoor Activities," below), who will lead you away from the crowds and deep in to the forest while your boat is docked at Puerto Blest. From Puerto Pañuelo, trips to Puerto Blest leave at 10am and return at 5pm; trips from Puerto San Carlos leave at 9am and return at 6pm. This is the first leg of the Cruce Andino lake crossing to Chile (see earlier in this chapter).

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

BIKING Mountain bike rental and information about bike trails and guided trips in Nahuel Huapi are available from **Bike Way,** V.A. O'Connor 867 (✆ **02944/425616**); and **Dirty Bikes,** V. A. O'Connor 681 (✆ **02944/425616**).

FISHING This region provides anglers with excellent fly-fishing on the Manso, Limay, Traful, and Machico rivers. Fishermen also troll on Lake Nahuel Huapi for introduced species such as brown trout, rainbow trout, and landlocked salmon. Even hard-core anglers will find enough to keep them busy here for weeks on end. The fishing season opens in November and runs through April. You can pick up information and fishing licenses at the **Baruzzi Fly Shop,** Urquiza 250 (✆ **02944/424922**), or the office of the Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi in the Civic Center. Bariloche is home to dozens of fly-fishing guides. Be sure to choose one who is fully licensed and provides lunch, transfers, and the appropriate gear. Recommended outfitters are Nico Martin at **Bariloche Anglers** (✆ **02944/462102;** www.barilocheanglers.com.ar) or **Ricigliano Fly Fishing** (✆ **02944/420368;** www.riciglianoflyfishing.com). Costs generally run around $300 (£204) per day for up to two people. Trolling and spinning are also available. Tour agencies such as **Huala Adventure Tourism,** San Martín 86 (✆ **02944/522438;** www.huala.com.ar), offer half-day and full-day fly-casting and trolling excursions.

GOLF There are three golf courses in the Bariloche area. The crème de la crème is the par-70 18-hole course at the **Llao Llao Resort** (✆ **02944/448530**). Above the shores of Lago Gutierrez, the **Arelauquen Golf Resort** (✆ **02944/431111**) is the newest 18-hole course in the area. There are 9 holes at the **Pinares Golf Club** (✆ **02944/476122**) on the road to the Llao Llao. Most are open from mid-September through mid-May, and fees run from $35 to $50 (£24–£34).

HIKING The Nahuel Huapi National Park has a well-developed trail system for day hikes, multiple-day hikes, and loops that connect several backcountry *refugios,* some of which offer rustic lodging. The national park office in the Civic Center provides detailed maps and guides to the difficulty level of each trail. Local hiking guides will share their knowledge and make for a safe and rewarding outing. An excellent multilingual local hiking guide and naturalist is **Max Schoffel** (✆ **02944/15-669669** [cell]; www.patagoniatravelco.com). Another great source for information is the **Club Andino,** Av. 20 de Febrero 30 (✆ **02944/422266;** www.clubandino.com.ar), which also has trails, guided trekking, ice walks, and climbing trips on Cerro Tronador.

HORSEBACK RIDING Horseback rides in various areas of the park are offered by **Tom Wesley Viajes de Aventura,** Bustillo Km 15.5 (✆ **02944/448193**), which also has a kid-friendly adventure camp. Rides cost an average of $40 (£27) for 2 hours and $55 (£37) for 3 hours. Just east of town, visit the **Estancia Fortín Chacabuco** (✆ **02944/554148;** www.estanciaspatagonicas.com) and ride with local gauchos. Full-day rides with a giant *asado* lunch cost $70 (£47). For overnight or multiday horseback riding trips, contact **Gatomancha** (✆ **02944/523009;** www.gatomancha.com).

KAYAK TOURING Recently, the many fiords of Nahuel Huapi Lake have been tempting visitors to explore in sea kayaks, or touring kayaks. It's a lovely outing that's possible in a variety of weather conditions. Operators such as **Senza Limiti** (✆ **02944/520597;** www.slimiti.com) also offer overnight tours, often year-round.

MOUNTAINEERING Experienced climbers, and those looking for a taste of the high peaks, have plenty of options in Bariloche, including the challenging 3-day climb of Mt. Tronador. Contact **Andes Cross** (✆ **02944/15-633581** [cell]; www.andescross.com) for guiding services.

RAFTING Various companies offer river rafting on the Río Manso in both Class III and Class IV sections, on full-day trips. The Rafting Frontera trip takes you to the Chilean border and is thrilling! The average cost for a trip is $65 to $95 (£44–£64). Easier floats down the Class I Río Limay are also available, for about $55 (£37) for a half-day. Excursions include all equipment, transportation, and a snack or lunch (full-day trips). The two best local rafting companies are **Patagonia Rafting,** San Martín 86 (✆ **02944/522438**), and **Extremo Sur,** Morales 765 (✆ **02944/427301**).

SKIING & SNOWBOARDING Bariloche's main winter draw is the ski resort at **Cerro Catedral** ★. When the resort's two former halves joined in 2005, everyone rejoiced. There are more terrain, better lifts, and close to a dozen on-slope restaurants to choose from, making this perhaps South America's greatest ski hill. The scenery is stunning. Lift tickets cost $25 to $45 (£17–£30) for adults and $12 to $28 (£8.20–£19) for kids, depending on high and low seasons. The season usually runs from June through October, with mid-August by far the busiest and most expensive time (when all Argentines have their 2-week winter holidays). Heavy snowfalls in September the past few years have helped keep the top sections open well into spring (which here means mid-Oct). Regardless, experienced skiers will want to stay high and explore the mountain from Punta Princesa to the south to Piedra del Condor on the north. There is lots of terrain for beginners and intermediates, as well as a snowboard park and tons of events throughout the season. For great slopeside atmosphere and a drop-dead view, have lunch at the traditional Refugio Lynch. Nonskiers can also enjoy the scene thanks to pedestrian lifts, open daily, that ferry passengers to the top. Every July, Catedral hosts the **National Snow Party,** with torchlight parades and other events (contact the Catedral ski resort for more information and each year's dates). The bustling Villa Catedral is at the base of the resorts, with a jumble of shops, rental stores, and several lodging options. The only ski-in, ski-out hotel is **Pire-Hue Hotel and Resort** (✆ **02944/460040;** www.pire-hue.com.ar). **Sudbruck Hostería** has a handful of spacious rooms decorated with rustic cypress wood (✆ **02944/460156;** www.sudbruck.com). Rooms start at about $95 (£64) per night for a double. **Cabañas Antu Pukem** has cabins for six to eight guests; consult them directly for prices (✆ **02944/460035**).

Catedral is home to a number of good ski instructors. For excellent ski guiding services, ranging from a few days at Catedral to a few weeks touring the many great ski resorts of Patagonia, contact **PowderQuest Tours** (✆ **888/565-7158** in North America; www.powderquest.com). They have very knowledgeable, experienced, and fun guides.

During the summer, the main gondolas are open to pedestrians for sightseeing Monday to Friday from 9:15am to 4pm.

WHERE TO STAY

If you're looking for luxury, you'll find the most options along Avenida Bustillo, the main road outside town that runs parallel to the lake and leads to the Llao Llao Peninsula. The larger hotels in the city (such as the Panamericano; p. 316) tend to cater to tour groups or students and aren't especially luxurious or service oriented. If you're planning to rent a car, then by all means stay outside the city and drive in at your convenience. You can also take the local bus or a quick taxi ride.

During the high season (Dec 15–Feb 28 and Easter week), prices double. Many hotels consider the winter months of July and August to be a second high season, with prices to match.

The cheapest rates are from March 1 to June 30 and September 1 to December 15. Dates vary; inquire before booking and always ask for promotions or discounts for multiday stays. Rates listed here are generally for high season.

Within the City Center

Expensive

Cacique Inacayal A new hotel right on the water downtown, the Inacayal offers comfortable rooms with great lakefront views, and it's just steps from town. The hotel clings to the side of the hill, entering at the main road level and reaching down to a stony beach. Traffic noise outside is a problem, as are the discos next door. Request a room on the west side. Still, indoors it's all business, with an efficient atrium-view elevator and bow-tied waiters. All rooms have great views, and the bottom-floor rooms include terraces. Decor is standard, with a dash of modernity. Lacquered wood, wicker, and wool predominate. The "Gran Confort" rooms are cheaper than a suite but plenty spacious. The hotel has packages that include breakfast and dinner, a strange option as what most appeals is its proximity to so many other restaurants.

Juan M. de Rosas 625, San Carlos de Bariloche. ✆ **02944/433888.** www.hotelinacayal.com.ar. 67 units. $185–$211 (£126–£143) double; $270 (£183) suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; wine bar; lobby cafe; spa; pool; laundry; garden w/beach access; Wi-Fi. *In room:* Safe, minibar.

Hotel Edelweiss ★ With its reliable service and huge double bedrooms, this hotel is a solid choice in downtown Bariloche in this price category; just don't come expecting luxury. It's the most similar to a Holiday Inn–style hotel in Bariloche. Double superiors have two full-size beds, bay windows, and lake views, as do the suites. Standard doubles are smaller, with a single full-size bed or two twins and a view of a building in the back, but they are just as comfortable and $10 (£5.50) cheaper. The design is pleasant but very run-of-the-mill for a hotel that deems itself a five-star. The suites deserve mention for their gargantuan size, with separate living areas and small bars; suite bathrooms have hydro-massage tubs. An aging penthouse pool with glass walls affords views of Lake Nahuel Huapi. The lounge area has polished floors, leather couches, and fresh flowers. The hotel offers attractive packages and promotional rates, so be sure to inquire when you make your reservations.

Av. San Martín 202, San Carlos de Bariloche. ✆ **02944/445510.** Fax 02944/445520. www.edelweiss.com.ar. 100 units. $210 (£143) double superior; from $295 (£200) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free valet parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; indoor pool; sauna; game room; room service. *In room:* TV, minibar, safe.

Hotel Panamericano Overrated The massive Hotel Panamericano is midway through a desperately needed makeover, essential if the hotel wants to keep its five stars (right now I'd say it's a three-plus). With 300 rooms, a casino, and a conference center, it's the biggest hotel in Patagonia. For the price, it offers none of the warmth, natural setting, or style of the Llao Llao (p. 318), for example. Rooms are spacious and comfortable, and some have had a face-lift. Most, though, still have old and used bathrooms, stuffy curtains, and dated carpets. Hallways are particularly dark and dreary. The new spa is the finest in town, with a lovely top-floor pool and deck. Lake views are available only above the fifth floor; in fact, the hotel rarely books rooms on the bottom floors unless they're hosting a convention, although they have plenty of tour groups that keep the hotel busy year-round. The back rooms face an ugly building, but they're cheaper. The junior suites are quite nice; they're actually a better deal than the regular suites. They're a tad smaller, but they come with plant-filled balcony patios, outdoor table and chairs, a fireplace, and a living area. A double comes with two full-size beds or one king-size. Inside the lobby, a faux waterfall trickles in the background, and a bar/lounge regularly has live piano music. The hotel has another 100 or so rooms and a casino on the other side of the street, connected by an aerial walkway.

Av. San Martín 536, San Carlos de Bariloche. ✆/fax **02944/425846.** www.panamericanobariloche.com.ar. 306 units. $295 (£200) double; $315 (£214) double with lake view ; from $500 (£339) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free valet parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; lounge; indoor pool; exercise room; sauna; room service; massage; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, safe.

Moderate

Hostería Las Marianas ★★ Finds A lovely, cozy inn just a few blocks from the Centro Cívico, Las Marianas is a great choice if you want both the convenience of downtown and the tranquillity of residential Bariloche. It's a renovated old Austrian-style mansion. The managers are friendly and fun. Beds have luxurious down comforters. The bedrooms aren't large, and bathrooms are particularly tight, but the warmth of the entire place makes up for it. Four new rooms on the top floor have nice views.

24 de Septiembre 218, San Carlos de Bariloche. ✆/fax **02944/439876.** www.hosterialasmarianas.com.ar. 14 units. $83 (£56) double; $102 (£69) 1 triple. Rates include buffet breakfast. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Lounge; laundry service; high-speed Internet. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, safe.

View Boutique Hotel Finds Practical, comfortable, modern, and friendly, this is a new boutique-style hotel just a block up the hill from the heart of town. The main floor is a large, bright lobby, where breakfast is served. As the name suggests, there are great views of the lake. Dark wood and cream walls characterize the rooms, which are a bit small but have cozy chocolate-colored fleece blankets and lots of closet space. Bathrooms have the same look, with dark wood and marble. A triple has a small deck (ask for an upgrade if you've booked a double). The owners, who opened the View Hotel in 2008, are here all the time to welcome you and help you organize your days. The convenience of being so close to town is hard to beat, and the modern vibe is refreshing.

Tucumán 221, San Carlos de Bariloche. ✆/fax **02944/522221.** www.viewhotel.com.ar. 12 units. $100 (£68) double; $126 (£86) triple. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; concierge; Wi-Fi. *In room:* TV.

Inexpensive

Patanuk Guesthouse With a hostel vibe and an awesome location right on the lake, the doubles and twins with private bathrooms here are good value. The style is loftlike, with an industrial design and local art on display. The shared rooms have a handful of bunk beds and the best views. Privates have a very simple bathroom with a stand-up shower. In the evenings, the garden opens up into a funky bar. There's a tiny computer squeezed in by the office that guests can use. If all you want is a fun, safe place to spend the night (and having your own bathroom is key), then this is a good choice.

Juan Manuel de Rosas 585, San Carlos de Bariloche. ✆ **02944/434991.** www.patanuk.com. 30 beds. $55 (£37) double with private bathroom; from $12 (£8.20) bunk. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Kitchen; bar; garden.

Perikos Youth Hostel ★ (Value) There are many backpacker hostels in town, but Perikos remains the friendly classic. It's a great choice for any traveler on a budget who wants to meet new friends, get off the beaten path, and explore independently. Perikos has 10 rooms: four doubles, two triples, two that sleep two to four people, and two that sleep six. Their private doubles are a great deal, with their own bathrooms. Breakfast and use of the kitchen is included in the price. On Friday nights, the hostel organizes a typical *asado* barbecue.

Morales 555, San Carlos de Bariloche. ✆ **02944/522326.** www.perikos.com. 10 units. $38 (£26) double; $11 (£7.45) bunk. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Kitchen; TV room w/DVD library.

Outside the City Center, on the Road to the Llao Llao Peninsula

Very Expensive

El Casco Art Hotel ★★★ Exclusive and elegant, this upscale inn midway between Bariloche and the Llao Llao is a spectacular place, what all hotel reviewers hunt for. It has remarkable services and amenities for an inn with only 33 rooms, not to mention a lovely lakeside setting. As the name suggests, there is highbrow artwork throughout—320 outstanding paintings and sculptures by some of the most important names in Latin American art to be exact. The hotel is just small enough to feel intimate. The rooms are hard to beat, both for their size (bathrooms are practically palatial) and their tasteful style. Plush marble bathrooms are slick and have separated tubs and shower. The spa and pool could be considered small, but don't forget, there are only 33 rooms here. The restaurant offers high-art inspired gourmet food. For all the pluses, there is a high price. But if excellent quality is your priority, and money isn't such a concern, this is a superb choice.

Av. Bustillo, Km 11.5, San Carlos de Bariloche. ✆ **02944/462929.** www.hotelelcasco.com. 33 units. $340–$600 (£231–£407) double; $750–$1,100 (£509–£747) suite. Rates include breakfast and transfers. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; indoor/outdoor pool; health club; spa; business center; free airport transfer. *In room:* A/C, TV, DVD player, minibar, safe, stereo.

Hostería Isla Victoria Lodge ★★ (Finds) How about a few nights at a remote lodge on an island in the middle of a huge mountain lake? Isla Victoria lodge, on the island of the same name, is located in the middle of the massive Nahuel Huapi Lake, and makes a divine upscale getaway. The views are truly stunning, with gourmet food, talented guides, and superb all-inclusive packages to match. The lodge itself was originally built in the 1940s and reopened (after a large fire) in 2002. In your spacious, comfortable room perched atop a cliff, you'll have the best view in the entire national park. But you won't be in your room much—most of your time will be spent outside, exploring the

island on foot, horseback, bike, or kayak. When the daily boat tours depart, you'll have the island to yourself. In the evenings, enjoy fine dining with an even finer view in the restaurant. It's romantic and intimate. Although children aren't specifically prohibited, families are gently discouraged, which is a shame as the island is a childhood dream come true. A 2-night stay here is just right.

Nahuel Huapi National Park. ✆ **02944/448088.** www.islavictoria.com. 22 units. 2-night packages from $740 (£502) per person double; 4-night packages $1,421 (£964) per person double. Packages include transfers, boat crossing, lodging, full board, excursions. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; wine cellar; outdoor pool; spa; library.

Llao Llao Hotel & Resort ★★ Kids The internationally renowned Llao Llao Hotel & Resort is one of the finest hotels in Latin America. Situated on a grassy crest of the Llao Llao Peninsula, and framed by rugged peaks, this five-star hotel is reminiscent of Canadian mountain lodges, with cypress and pine-log walls, stone fireplaces, antler chandeliers, and barn-size salons. Maintaining very high standards and offering a slew of amenities, this is *the* place to spend the night if you're willing to splurge for a special evening. A driveway winds upward to the hotel, where a discreet security guard monitors traffic (the hotel tries to keep gawkers at a distance, although visitors may come for a drink, afternoon tea, or a meal, but only with a prior reservation). From the lobby, every turn leads to another remarkable room, including a "winter garden" cafe, whose expansive glass walls look out onto a large patio, the hotel's golf course, and Lake Nahuel Huapi beyond. All rooms are decorated in a rustic country design and have gleaming white bathrooms. Standard rooms are comfortable but quite small; superior suites are split into bedroom and living areas and some come with a wraparound deck and fireplace; a lovely two-bedroom cabin with a splendid view of Lake Moreno is also available. Opened in 2008, the hotel's new Moreno Wing has 43 suites and studios that were designed to please North Americans—they are larger, and have wide windows and terraces, air-conditioning, and massive bathrooms. The spa affords views that are nothing less than panoramic. A myriad of daily activities are included in the price of the rooms, from adult watercolor-painting classes to games and events for kids. Transfers to and from the airport and the ski hill are also included. The hotel's fine-dining restaurant, **Los Cesares,** is currently well overshadowed by nearby restaurants (see "Where to Dine," below). It's definitely time for the hotel to up the ante with its dining options.

Av. Bustillo, Km 25, San Carlos de Bariloche. ✆ **02944/448530.** Fax 02944/445789. Reservations (in Buenos Aires) ✆ **11/4311-3434.** Fax 11/4314-4646. www.llaollao.com. 172 units. $350–$595 (£238–£404) double; $715–$855 (£485–£580) studio; $840–$1,680 (£570–£1,140) suite; $840–$1,045 (£570–£709) cottage. Rates include buffet breakfast and parking. Rates rise substantially during the holidays, Christmas to New Year's, and Easter. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; lounge; small indoor heated pool; golf course; tennis courts; exercise room; fabulous spa; Jacuzzi; extensive watersports equipment; children's center; video arcade; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; shopping arcade; salon; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; valet parking; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C (some), TV, safe, minibar, kettle.

Expensive

Aldebaran ★ Finds Serenity, silence, and highly personalized service make this remote retreat one of the Lake District's newest treasures. Far off the typical tourist route, each of the 10 rooms here enjoys lovely views across the Campanario Arm of Nahuel Huapi Lake. The design and construction are very natural, from stone-and-wood walls to cement floors. Thick Mediterranean-style walls have curved ceilings and dark hallways. Rooms are large, with earth-toned blankets, cozy nooks, and a blend of modern and recycled furniture. Rustic bathrooms have large tubs and spotlights. All have either

a balcony or a patio. Downstairs, an indoor/outdoor pool and serene spa are deeply relaxing. There's a new lakeside deck and a "dojo" for yoga and relaxing. Ten minutes down a dirt road, on the coast of the San Pedro Peninsula, Aldebaran is a compelling hideaway. (Media junkies be warned: Rooms don't have TV.) Staying here without a rental car, however, can be a headache, as each outing requires waiting for a taxi to come, and many excursions and guides won't pick you up at a place so remote.

Península San Pedro, Av. Bustillo, Km 20.4, San Carlos de Bariloche. ✆ **02944/465143.** www.aldebaranpatagonia.com. 10 units. From $283 (£192) double; $504 (£342) suite. Rates include breakfast and free airport transfer. AE, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; spa; laundry; dock; TV/DVD room. *In room:* Hair dryer, safe.

Design Suites ★ Catering to stylish young couples, this hotel in Bariloche is unique in many ways. The exterior look is ultramodern, and the location, 2.5km (1 1/2 miles) from town amid a large garden, is excellent. The interior design is contemporary and minimalist, with local materials such as wood, stone, and glass enhanced by a revolving display of local art. Rooms are among the largest in town, with light hardwood floors, crisp cream walls, plenty of shelving, and small patios. They may remind you of IKEA showrooms. Ample bathrooms have heated floors. All have either a jetted tub or a full hot tub nestled beneath a bay window. They all have advanced technology appliances, from snazzy little stereo systems to flatscreen televisions. Entrance hallways allow rooms to stay clean and dry. The junior suites have the best views.

The rooms are spread among four buildings, each with an outdoor elevator. So you must go outside to get to and fro (and up and down a slight hill); breakfast is served in the main building.

Av. Bustillo, Km 2.5, San Carlos de Bariloche. ✆ **02944/457000.** www.designsuites.com. 78 units. $200–$275 (£136–£187) double; $250–$325 (£170–£221) junior suite. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; indoor/outdoor pool; gym; spa; sauna; kids' club; shop; art gallery. *In room:* TV, minibar, coffeemaker, safe, stereo.

Hotel Sol del Nahuel ★ Finds Making full use of a strategic lakeside location, this inn is bright, cheery, and peaceful. It comfortably lets the lake be the star of the scene. Positioned below the main road, the hotel is protected from traffic noise, unlike many of the other inns along Bustillo. The lobby is reminiscent of an Alpine ski chalet, with a massive fireplace and comfy couches. All rooms have spectacular views overlooking the lake. Rooms are large, with wood floors and neutral colors that let the gorgeous blues of the lake shine. Downstairs, a warm indoor/outdoor pool is open year-round. The grounds also encompass a vast garden with a private beach and barbecue.

Av. Bustillo, Km 5.4, San Carlos de Bariloche. ✆ **02944/520700.** www.soldelnahuel.com.ar. 17 units. $195 (£132) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool; sauna; massage; garden. *In room:* TV, minibar, safe.

Villa Huinid ★ Villa Huinid is a top-notch choice for travelers looking for independent accommodations outside town. Facing the lake, just 2.5km (1 1/2 miles) from the city center, the complex is backed by a thick forest with a walking trail. There are 12 cabins handcrafted of knotty cypress, and a new hotel complex with 50 high-level rooms. Cabins have stone fireplaces, lovely decks with a full-size barbecue, and a handsome decor of floral wallpaper, plaid bedspreads, and craftsy furniture. The units come as four-, six-, and eight-person cabanas with fully stocked kitchens. In the main building, spacious and bright standard rooms have a cozy, country cottage style. The bathrooms are sumptuous, with wooden sinks and hydro-massage tubs. There is a large spa with a spectacular pool. Service here is very good.

Av. Bustillo, Km 2.5., San C arlos de Bariloche . ✆/fax **02944/523523.** www.villahuinid.com.ar. 62 units . $189–$311 (£128–£211) f orest-view double; $231–$374 (£157–£254) lake -view double; $287–$458 (£195–£311) cabins (sleeping 4–6 people). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; pool; gym; spa; game room; laundry service; high-speed Internet. *In room:* TV, fridge, coffeemaker, safe.

Cabanas

The southern shor eline of N ahuel Huapi Lake is dotted with cabin complex es for visitors. Some have only one or two cabanas for rent, while other have up to a dozen. They're a nice way to be self-sufficient, pr epare your own meals, and make y ourself at home. Some can be v ery affordable, especially outside the high-season months of J anuary and August. Bungalows and apar t-hotels are similar options. Try the fun **El Bosque de los Elfos,** A venida B ustillo, Km 5 (✆ **02944/442356;** www .bungalowsdeloselfos.com. ar), or the upscale lakefr ont **Puerto Pireo,** Bustillo Km 17.1 (✆ **02944/448484;** www. puertopireo.com.ar). **Patagonia Vista,** Bustillo Km 21.85 (✆ **02944/448735;** www.patagoniavista.com.ar), is a ne w complex also right on the lake, with lake houses available.

WHERE TO DINE

The restaurants in do wntown Bariloche, unlike the hotels, ar e an ex cellent v alue. Still, the choicest meals to be had ar e lakeside. Meals here, often like the service, are leisurely; always allow plenty of time for lunch (2 hr.) and dinner (3 hr.).

Within the City Center

Expensive

Kandahar ★ REGIONAL Named after the famed European ski race, rather than the Afghani capital, Kandahar is one of the best restaurants in town. In this funky and colorful old house with cozy nooks, the food is cr eative and fresh. The rosehip soup is a great starter, as is the Kandahar salad with gr eens from the owner's garden and smoked v enison. F or main dishes, tr y homemade pastas such as gnocchi with oliv es, tr out with spinach, rabbit with quince sauce, or pepper ed tenderloin. The desser ts ar e ex cellent, including grilled spiced apples with ice cr eam. This place is always busy, so a reservation is essential. Lately, they've been having tr ouble with their cr edit card system, so if that's essential to you, call ahead to double-check.

20 de F ebrero 628. ✆ **02944/424702.** Reser vations highly r ecommended. M ain c ourses $12–$18 (£8.20–£12). AE. Daily 8pm–midnight.

Naan ★★ Finds FUSION Hard to find but impossible to forget, Naan is a revelation in Patagonia. The couple (he's the chef, she's the ser vice) who operate this small r estaurant inside a house in a leafy neighborhood hav e trav eled the world and br ought the flavors back to Bariloche. Starters range from Italian and Middle Eastern dishes to Vietnamese and French specialties. Main courses include a lamb curry and a coconut chicken and prawns that will awaken y our senses. They also pr epare a souvlakia and tofu tempura—practically a r evolutionary dish for these par ts. And the filet mignon *a la pampa* is divine. Less adv enturous diners will delight in the simple, light tr out. The vie w is spectacular, and the vibe is slightly chaotic but sensual and delightful. They close for holidays in low season, so call befor e heading out.

Campichuelo 568. ✆ **02944/421785.** Reser vations r equired. M ain c ourses $12–$19 (£8.20–£13). No credit cards. Jan 1 to Easter and July 10–Sept 30 daily 8–11:30pm; post-Easter to July 9 and Oct 1–Dec 31 Tues–Sun 8–11:30pm.

Santos ★★ MODERN ITALIAN This location on Calle España has been a revolving door for some of the most interesting restaurants in the area. Right now, Santos is the best restaurant in the center of Bariloche. It's a hip, fun, stylish place, with a menu based on simple, fresh Italian food that is remarkably flavorful. Entrees include superb sirloin-stuffed panzottis with spinach and cream sauce. Tourist favorites like fondues (the "Santos" fondue includes bacon, endives, and cherry tomatoes), a straight-forward peppered tenderloin, and local trout are also on the list. There's a living room for chilling out, and a wine list that has lots of excellent midrange options. Try the Corte C from Vistalba.

España 268. ✆ **02944/425942.** Reservations highly recommended. Main courses $10–$17 (£6.80–£12). No credit cards. Dec–Mar and July–Aug daily 8pm–1am. Closed Sun rest of the year.

Moderate

Días de Zapata MEXICAN Mexican food is very foreign to Argentines, but Bariloche's best Mexican restaurant is surprisingly good and a nice change of pace from *parrillas*. You'll find the usual tacos, fajitas, and nachos on the menu, but you'll also find more uncommon Mexican dishes such as Veracruz conger eel. Every evening, from 7 to 9pm, the restaurant hosts a happy hour, with buy-one-get-one-free drinks. The warm brick walls and Mexican folk art make for a cozy atmosphere; the service is very friendly, too. This place packs up quickly, so go early (before 9:30pm).

Morales 362. ✆ **02944/423128.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $13–$16 (£8.80–£11). MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 7pm–midnight.

El Boliche de Alberto Overrated PARRILLA Long considered by many to be the best *parrilla* in Bariloche, Alberto is an institution in these parts. Some regulars have been coming back for 20 years, and some make the crossing from Chile just to have a piece of beef here. The menu is brief, with several cuts of beef, chicken, and sausages; salads; and side dishes such as french fries. The dining area is unpretentious and brightly lit, with wooden tables. A typical *bife de chorizo* steak is so thick you'll need to split it with your dining partner; if you're alone, they can do a half-order for $11 (£7.45). They don't accept reservations, so there is almost always a long line here, which has the waiters hurriedly (rudely, if you ask me) rushing diners through their meals in an effort to keep filling tables fast-food style. The wine list is straight from the supermarket and seriously overpriced. Yes, the meat is good. But for the same price, you can go somewhere less touristy and crowded and actually enjoy your meal at a reasonable pace. There's a second location on Avenida Bustillo, at Km 8.

Villegas 347. ✆ **02944/431433.** Main courses $11–$18 (£7.45–£12). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 8pm–midnight.

El Boliche Viejo ★ Moments REGIONAL Step back in time to the old Patagonian pioneer days, at this country store dating back more than a century. Little has changed since the days when Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid purportedly stopped in for a meal. It's northeast of Bariloche, on the road to Villa La Angostura, past the airport turnoff and the town of Dina Huapi. The menu is pure Patagonian, including lamb slow-grilled on a spit and every cut of beef you could imagine, from T-bone to tongue. This makes a great stop for a midday meal if you are on a sightseeing drive.

Ruta 237, at Lima y River bridge. ✆ **02944/468452.** Main courses $12–$18 (£8.20–£12). MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 8:30pm–midnight.

Familia Weiss Kids REGIONAL The Weiss family is well known all over the region for their outstanding smoked meats and cheeses, which they've been selling from their

shop at Mitre 360 for decades. Their restaurant near the waterfront is so architecturally unique you really should at least stop in for one of the locally brewed beers and to view the handsome interiors. It's very tourist-friendly. The decor includes cypress trunks that form pillars rising from a mosaic floor also made of cypress. The menu is quite large. Start off with an appetizer of the smoked meats, seafood, and cheese for which the Familia Weiss is known. There's cheese-and-beef fondue with five dipping sauces; large, leafy salads; stewed venison with spaetzle; grilled meats with fresh vegetables; homemade pastas; local trout served with ratatouille; and much, much more. A good wine list and a kids' menu make the Familia Weiss an unpretentious crowd-pleaser.

Corner of Palacios and V.A. O'Connor. ✆ **02944/435789.** Main courses $5–$12 (£3.40–£8.20). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–1am.

Tarquino Moments REGIONAL Worth visiting for the architecture alone, this friendly family-run grill in front of the leafy Plaza Belgrano feels like a storybook tree-house. After entering through a stunning wooden door that would suit a hobbit, choose a table beside a live towering cypress tree (this is Bariloche's famous rustic building style at its most imaginative). The food is good, especially the beef: There are standard grill selections, such as *bife de chorizo* (a 650g/22-oz. piece of tender flank steak), pork tenderloin, or grilled trout with almond sauce. The servings are large. There is also a salad bar.

24 de Septiembre (corner of Saavedra). ✆ **02944/431601.** Main courses $14–$21 (£9.45–£14). Reservations recommended. MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 8pm–midnight.

Inexpensive

El Mundo PIZZERIA El Mundo serves up crispy pizza in more than 100 varieties, as well as empanadas, pastas, and salads. The sheer number of pies makes the menu a little overwhelming. The pasta is fresh, and they deliver. A large seating area makes El Mundo a good spot for groups.

Mitre 759. ✆ **02944/423461.** Main courses $5.50–$11 (£3.75–£7.45). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight.

La Fonda del Tio REGIONAL The lineups tell the story of just how popular this local joint is. A recent expansion will help shorten the wait. But it's worth it. For more than 22 years, this place has been offering Argentine family favorites, including a wide option of *milanesas* (breaded veal cutlets), with cheese, jam, tomato sauce, or hard-boiled eggs. There's other classics, such as simple cuts of beef, that go well with giant french fries. Portions are enormous. Match them with a soft drink (try the Quatro pomelo grapefruit soda) or a glass of table wine. This a good place to try real Argentine cooking and take a break from the tourist scene.

Mitre 1130. ✆ **02944/435011.** Main courses $7–$14 (£4.75–£9.45). No reservations. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight.

Rock Chicken FAST FOOD Bariloche has no McDonald's or any other multinational fast-food chain. What they do have is Rock Chicken, a local staple and a great place to grab a quick and cheap bite. The grill is wide open so there is no doubt what is coming your way. Choose from a *choripán* (chorizo sausage on a bun), *milanesa* (breaded beef), grilled chicken, or a slice of sirloin. Menus usually include a drink (beer or wine) and a choice of salad or french fries.

Rolando 245. ✆ **02944/435669.** Main courses $7–$11 (£4.75–£7.45). No credit cards. Daily 10am–4am.

Vegetariano ★ VEGETARIAN If you need a break from the grills, head to this unpretentious, cozy restaurant for a dose of veggies. Recipes are purely homemade. Meals are served as a large and nutritious daily set menu; you can usually choose either fish or a soy patty. The mixed juice is chock-full of vitamins, and the tea served at the end of the meal is delightful. Try to save room for dessert; the sweets here are excellent. The staff is very friendly.

20 de Febrero 730. ✆ **02944/421820.** Main courses $10–$14 (£6.80–£9.45). No credit cards. Mon–Sat noon–3pm; Mon–Fri 8–11pm.

Outside the City Center (En Route to the Llao Llao Peninsula)

Note that the majority of these places do not accept credit cards!

Expensive

Butterfly ★★★ Finds MODERN FUSION The three young amigos who own and run this amazing and tiny lakeside restaurant could have set up shop just about anywhere in the world—the Michelin-trained chef is Irish, the delightful sommelier's German, and the charming server is a Porteña. That they chose a lovely location just above Bariloche's popular Playa Bonita illustrates their passion for this place. Local ingredients, from rabbit and duck to leeks and berries, are sourced daily and presented in an impeccably intricate seven-course menu. Wine is offered by the bottle or as a highly recommended paired tasting. On summer days, lunch and dinner are served on the outdoor patio. Reservations are required.

Hua Huan 7831, at Bustillo, Km 7.9, Playa Bonita. ✆ **02944/461441.** www.butterflypatagonia.com.ar. Reservations required. 7-course set-price menu $50 (£34). V. Thurs–Tues 1–3pm and 8:30pm–midnight.

Cassis ★ EUROPEAN/REGIONAL Mariana Muller's inspired restaurant is nestled on a cliff overlooking Lago Gutierrez, just to the south of Bariloche. Inside, with high wooden rafters and gentle candlelight, you may feel like you've come to visit the cottage of your casually stylish friends. The food has its roots in Europe. There are usually three to five fixed four-course menus to choose from. They may include warm shrimps with gin and lemon as an appetizer, followed by sweetbreads in a pecan panzotti, and then a slow-cooked salmon or a lamb strudel in sauvignon blanc reduction. That means limited flexibility, and you will likely have a large meal. But the pace is gentle, making for a leisurely experience. The wine cellar has more than 200 labels. Prices are very high for Bariloche standards. Cassis is also a nice spot for a late afternoon cocktail and light meal on the deck.

Ruta 82, on Lago Gutierrez, 1km (⅔ mile) past the entrance to the Coihues neighborhood. ✆ **02944/476167.** Reservations highly recommended. 4-course fixed menus $45–$70 (£30–£47). No credit cards. Summer daily 6pm–midnight; winter daily 8pm–midnight.

Il Gabbiano ★★ Finds ITALIAN If Bariloche's dining scene has a sure thing, this outstanding Italian restaurant is it. Located close to the Llao Llao, Il Gabbiano is a labor of love for its owners. It's set inside a bungalow that has a Mediterranean feel, with brick, iron, and stone work reminiscent of a countryside farmhouse. The menu is authentic *Italiano.* Antipasti include bruschetta and salmon with grapefruit. Delicate homemade pastas are varied and fresh. Main entrees include *osso buco,* rabbit with garlic and rosemary, and a simple trout with lemon. The wine cellar has more than 250 labels, including a good selection of European varieties, rare in Patagonia. ***Note:*** They do not accept any credit cards.

Av. Bustillo, Km 24.3. ✆ **02944/448346.** Reservations highly recommended. Main courses $16–$24 (£11–£16). No credit cards. Wed–Mon 7:30pm–midnight.

Yuco ★★ Moments MODERN ARGENTINE When reclusive Chef Fernando Sharpf moved from downtown out to this stunning location near the Llao Llao hotel, he took things up a notch. His cuisine was already very inventive, but here it's fantastically flavorful and deeply detailed. Dishes are generally trios or sampling menus centered around one main ingredient: lamb, local trout, or leek, for example. Each is prepared delicately in three or four unique ways. The dessert list includes a chocolate tasting. The views, of course, are stunning, so try to arrive before sunset. Your meal here will be unforgettable. Yuco is also open for afternoon tea, but call ahead because hours are sporadic.

Calle Monet 306, at Bustillo, Km 23.6. ✆ **02944/448436.** Reservations highly recommended. Main courses $19–$26 (£13–£18). No credit cards. Daily 11am–1am (closed Mon lunch and Sun dinner).

Moderate

Rincon Patagonico PARRILLA The food may not be as world-class as some of the other places listed below, but the atmosphere here is very tourist-friendly, highlighting the unique local architecture. The wine list is also almost entirely Patagonian. They use local lamb on the grill. A typical meal would start with grilled provolone, then be followed by a giant steak or lamb, and a side salad and fries. It's a very large space, and it can alternately feel empty or offer privacy.

Av. Bustillo, Km 14, on the road to Llao Llao. ✆ **02944/463063.** Main courses $11–$18 (£7.45–£12). MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 8:30pm–midnight.

BARILOCHE AFTER DARK

Open 24 hours a day, the lakefront wine bar **Trentis Lakebar,** J.M. de Rosas 435 (no phone), is a great place for a cocktail. Bariloche is home to a handful of discos catering to the 16- to 30-year-old crowd. These discos adhere to Buenos Aires nightlife hours, beginning around midnight or 12:30am, with the evening peaking at about 3 or 4am. The cover charge is usually $3 to $4 (£2–£2.70) per person, and women often enter for free. Try **Roket,** J.M. de Rosas 424 (✆ 02944/431940), or **Cerebro,** J.M. de Rosas 405 (✆ 02944/424965). Earlier in the evening, locals gather at the **Roxvury,** San Martín 490 (✆ 02944/400451), for funky music and big-screen light shows. There are a number of local pubs, including **Wilkenny,** San Martín 435 (✆ 02944/424444), and **Pilgrim,** Palacios 167 (✆ 02944/421686). Microbrew pubs are also popular in Bariloche. Downtown, try **Antares,** Elflein 47 (✆ 02944/431454). **Cervecería Blest,** Avenida Bustillo, Km 11.5 (✆ 02944/461026), the oldest microbrewery in Argentina. Next door, **Berlina,** Avenida Bustillo, Km 11.75 (✆ 02944/523336), is hip and fresh.

The **Worest Casino,** Av. San Martín 570 (✆ 02944/425846), is open from 9am to 5am. **Cine Arrayán** is a one-screen local cinema at Moreno 39 (✆ 02944/422860). A more modern cinema is at Shopping Patagonia, Onelli 447 (✆ 02944/427189). Both often show English-language movies with Spanish subtitles.

2 SOUTH OF BARILOCHE ★★

The massive Nahuel Huapi National Park extends to the south of Bariloche in a winding maze of majestic mountains and lakes. Whether you're on a day's drive, as part of an overnight getaway from the hustle and bustle of Bariloche, or en route to a world-class

fly-fishing lodge, this area is definitely worth exploring. Driving south out of Bariloche on RN 40, you'll pass tall waterfalls and snowy peaks, edge around emerald lakes, and drop through a deep canyon as you head to El Bolsón. This laid-back town has a microclimate that has drawn nature lovers from around the country since the 1960s.

Heading south from Bariloche, you'll find the lovely **Estancia Peuma Hue** ★★ (✆ **02944/15-501030** [cell]; www.peuma-hue.com) on the south shore of Lake Gutierrez. With two large houses and two cabins, as well as a slew of outdoor activities such as horseback riding and trekking, this high-end complex is intimate. It's one of the only ways to live a more rural Patagonian experience so close to Bariloche. A 3-day all-inclusive plan starts at $255 (£173) per person per day.

Continuing south, you'll pass the **Continental Divide**—a wide marsh where the water drains north to Lake Gutierrez and then on to the Nahuel Huapi and the Atlantic; and west through Lake Mascardi, over the border to Chile and the Pacific.

A DRIVING TOUR: CERRO TRONADOR, LOS ALERCES WATERFALL & VENTISQUERO NEGRO

This wonderful, full-day excursion takes visitors through lush forest and past emerald lakes (such as the picturesque Lago Mascardi), waterfalls, and beaches to a trail head that leads to the face of **Ventisquero Negro (Black Glacier).** You'll need a vehicle to drive the 215km (133-mile) round-trip road, including a detour to Cascada Los Alerces (Los Alerces Waterfall); it's 170km (105 miles) without the detour. Plan to stop frequently at the various lookout points along the road. Most tour agencies offer this excursion for about $35 to $40 (£24–£27) a person. A private bilingual local guide can also take you for around $160 (£108) plus transportation.

At 35km (22 miles) south of Bariloche, you'll reach Villa Mascardi. Take RP 81, the road that branches off to the right. You must stop at the National Parks gates and pay an entrance fee of $3.50 (£2.35) for foreigners. Past the turnoff to Pampa Linda and Los Rapidos campsite, continue to the Río Manso bridge, where a road heads left to the Los Alerces Waterfall. A 300m (984-ft.) walk takes you to a vista point overlooking the waterfall. After doubling back, you reach the bridge again, where you head left, continuing along the shore of Lake Mascardi until you reach the **Hotel Tronador** (✆ **02944/441062;** www.hoteltronador.com), where the views of Mt. Tronador are outstanding. The charming log cabin hotel, built in 1929 by a Belgian immigrant family, is backed by high peaks and makes a good spot for lunch or a quiet getaway for overnight visitors. They have 30 rooms; high-season (Jan–Feb) prices for a double start at $115 (£78). The road continues up the valley of the Río Manso Superior, winding through alpine scenery until reaching the lush and expansive Pampa Linda plains, where there is another inn and teahouse. The final leg ends at a stunning cirque (a steep valley with a lake) draped with vegetation and water falls. From here a trail leads to the Black Glacier, named for the debris that colors the ice at its terminus. The mountain's power is imposing here. Return to Bariloche the same way you came, and see if you can pick out the heart-shaped Isla Corazón in the middle of Lago Mascardi.

Note that the route to Tronador, RP 81, is a narrow gravel road with restricted hours of transit during the busy summer months. Cars are allowed to travel in toward Tronador in the mornings only (9:30am–2pm), and travel out again in the afternoon only (4:30–7:30pm). Check with the Tourist Information Office before heading out.

Ruta 40: The Road South

The mighty and legendary **Ruta 40** is one of the world's great adventure drives. It takes you along the eastern slope of the Andes from the top of Argentina all the way to the bottom of Patagonia. For travelers with a few extra days, 3-night Ruta 40 trips are organized by **Chalten Travel** (✆ **02944/456005;** www.chaltentravel.com); **Tohol Expediciones** (✆ **02944/456327;** www.toholexpediciones.com) includes stops at traditional *estancias,* petroglyphs, and untouched national parks, and it costs a budget-friendly $450 (£305) per person. It starts in Bariloche and ends in El Calafate. Don't even think of making this expedition on your own without a 4WD in excellent condition, stocked with all the necessary supplies. This land is Patagonia off the beaten track.

EL BOLSON

131km (81 miles) S of Bariloche

A lovely town of 11,000 set amid a lush valley, El Bolsón is equally famous for its artisan's fair and its microclimate, which makes it almost 7°F (4°C) warmer than in Bariloche. On Saturdays throughout the year, and on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays in summer, El Bolsón hosts a wonderful **Artisan and Produce Market** ★★ in its central plaza. Stroll the stands for organic fruit, wool sweaters, homemade jams, wooden cutting boards, and microbrewed beer. There are also vegetarian sandwiches, sweet waffles, and delicious Armenian empanadas to grab as snacks. It usually runs from 10am to 4pm. Because El Bolsón is in a basin surrounded by tall peaks, there is great hiking here. One of the most interesting hikes takes you up to the **Bosque Tallado,** a magical forest with sculpted tree trunks. Inquire at the Tourist Information Center, Avenida San Martín and Roca (✆ **02944/492604**), for trail maps and other information.

El Bolsón is also known for its production of hops, its microbreweries, and its annual **Beer Festival,** held each year in late February. South of El Bolsón by 15km (9 1/3 miles) is **Lago Puelo National Park,** where visitors can swim, boat, hike, camp, and fish.

Where to Stay & Dine

The downtown core has some standard hotels, the best of which is **Hotel Cordillera,** Av. San Martín 3220 (✆ **02944/492235**). Rooms have lovely balconies. Doubles start at $70 (£47). Outside town, you can soak up the authentic El Bolsón lifestyle at **La Casona de Odile,** Barrio Luján, Km 6 (✆ **02944/492753;** www.interpatagonia.com/odile), a small inn and restaurant serving French cuisine and local produce. Rooms start at $45 (£30), and for $62 (£42) you can include three fabulous meals a day. **Jauja** ★, Av. San Martín 3261 (✆ **02944/493505**), is home to an outstanding ice-cream parlor and a good restaurant next door with delicious trout entrees. Vegetarians will love **La Calabaza,** Av. San Martín 2518 (✆ **02944/492910**), which serves soups, salads, and quiches.

SOUTH OF EL BOLSON

Farther along the road is the village of **Cholila,** where Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid hid out and ranched in peace from 1901 to 1906. They became cherished members of this tiny community. You can still spot the old farmhouse the two fugitives built.

South of Cholila, the outstanding **Museo Leleque** (✆ **02944/451141;** Tues–Thurs 11am–5pm) is 6km (3 3/4 miles) from town on RP 15. Situated on an enormous ranch once owned by the South-Land Company, and now part of the extensive landholdings of the Italian clothier family Benetton, this excellent museum focuses on the history of rural Patagonia. Nearby is the **Los Alerces National Park** ★, one of the world's finest fly-fishing areas. Its majestic giant alerce trees are more than 2,000 years old, and mesmerizing emerald lakes come into view at every turn. **Esquel Outfitters** (✆ **406/581-1760** in the U.S.; www.esqueloutfitters.com) will hook you up on a dreamy weeklong fishing adventure, with accommodations in their luxurious and remote lodge. The best lodge around is the **Lago Cholila Lodge** (✆ **02944/610310;** www.cholila.com).

Continuing south is the small city of Esquel, 310km (193 miles) south of Bariloche and 180km (119 miles) from El Bolsón. It's another mecca for fly-fishing and home to a little-known but gorgeous ski resort called La Hoya. **Hosteria Canela** (✆ **02945/453890;** www.canelaesquel.com) is a lovely B&B in the nicest part of town.

3 VILLA LA ANGOSTURA ★★

81km (50 miles) N of Bariloche; 44km (27 miles) E of the Chilean border

Villa La Angostura is the loveliest mountain village in Argentina. Meaning "Narrow Village," it takes its name from the slender isthmus that connects the town's center with the Quetrihué Peninsula. The town was founded in 1934 by a handful of simple farmers who were eventually displaced by out-of-towners, selecting this lovely location for their summer homes. Increased boating activity, the paving of the road to Bariloche, increased tourism to Chile (the border of which is just 20 min. from town), and the inauguration of several exclusive hotels and a slew of bungalow complexes have converted Villa La Angostura into a upscale getaway for the rich and famous. Even so, this tiny enclave hosts only a fraction of visitors to the region, unlike Bariloche. This picturesque village, with a smorgasbord of mountains and lakes nearby, is for visitors seeking solitude. Most lodging options are tucked away in the forest or on the shore of the Lake Nahuel Huapi, providing beautiful views and quiet surroundings. Like Bariloche, Villa La Angostura is within the borders of Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi. If Bariloche is for action, Villa la Angostura is for relaxing by the lake and slowing things down.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

BY PLANE For airport and flight information, see "Getting There," under "San Carlos de Bariloche," earlier in this chapter. To get to Villa La Angostura from the airport, take a taxi or transfer service (about $55–$75/£37–£51). The drive takes about an hour.

BY BUS **Algarrobal Buses** (✆ **02944/494360**) leave for Villa La Angostura from Bariloche's Terminal de Omnibus about every 3 hours from 8am to 9pm. The trip takes about 1 1/2 hours. **Albus** (✆ **02944/423552**) also goes to Villa La Angostura four times a day.

BY CAR Villa La Angostura is a 1-hour drive from Bariloche around the north shore of Lake Nahuel Huapi. Take the coastal road northeast of town past the village at Dina Huapi, and turn left on RP 231.

Shopping in "La Villa": Worth the Drive Around the Lake

More compact and stylish than its sprawling neighbor Bariloche, Villa la Angostura's main drag, Avenida Arrayanes, makes a great destination for shopping. Brand-name stores, such as Kill and Cardon, have shops here. The **Paseo de Compras** at Av. Arrayanes 172 (no phone) has lovely upscale silver and leatherwear. Also try **La Candela** (Av. Arrayanes 188; ✆ **02944/495686**) and **Aladino** (Av. Arrayanes 193; ✆ **02944/15-607529** [cell]). Just down Las Mutisias is **Blumenhaus** (Las Mutisias 192; ✆ **02944/495752**) for lovely candles and ceramics. **Patagonia Exquisiteces** (Av. Arrayanes 231; ✆ **02944/495084**) has such gourmet food products as smoked meats and chocolate, as well as Patagonian wines. At the western end of Arrayanes is the handicrafts market. Even nonshoppers will delight in the lovely architecture, and don't forget to stop in at **Jauja** (Av. Arrayanes 40; no phone) for an ice-cream cone!

Visitor Information

The **Secretaría de Turismo** is at Av. Siete Lagos 93 (✆ **02944/494124**), open daily from 8am to 8pm. It offers accommodations listings and prices, and information about excursions around the area. For information about Nahuel Huapi National Park or Parque Nacional Los Arrayanes, try the **Oficína de Turismo** at the pier (✆ **02944/494152**), open Monday through Friday from 11am to 4pm (Wed until 2pm), and Saturday and holidays from 2:30 to 5pm.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Parque Nacional Los Arrayanes ★

The Parque Nacional Los Arrayanes is home to the only two *arrayán* forests in the world (although the *arrayán* can be found throughout this region, including in Chile), one of which can be visited at the tip of Península Quetrihué. This fascinating bush grows as high as 20m (66 ft.) and looks to the untrained eye like a tree, with slick cinnamon-colored trunks that are cool to the touch. They are especially beautiful in the spring when in bloom.

The peninsula itself offers a pleasant 24km (15-mile) round-trip moderate hiking and biking trail to the *arrayán* forest. Most visitors either walk (2–3 hr.) or bike (1–2 hr.) half the trail and then boat to or back from the park; you can also take the boat both ways (trip time: 2½ hr.). From the interior side of the port at Bahía Mansa, the **Catamaran Futaleufú** (✆ **02944/494004,** or 02944/494405 at the dock; www.bosquelosarrayanes.com.ar) departs daily at 2pm, and in high season at 10:30am, 2pm, and 5:30pm. The return trip costs $32 (£22) per person; one-way costs $18 (£12). **Bettanso Excursiones** has a 50-person boat with daily departures at 2:30pm, and six to seven trips during the summer for the same price as Paisano (✆ **02944/495024**). Bettanso also offers excursions to Isla Victoria and Puerto Blest, a trip that is described in "Boat Excursions," earlier in this chapter.

Villa La Angostura is a main stop on the popular Ruta de los Siete Lagos from Bariloche. It's also the last stop on the road to the border with Chile. That, unfortunately,

means the main street is a thoroughfare for tractor-trailer trucks making their way south from Puerto Montt to southern Chile (there is no road through southern Chile, so all transport has to come through Argentina).

Other Outdoor Activities

BIKING **Free Bikes,** at Las Fucsias and Los Notros (✆ **02944/495047;** www.freebikes.com.ar), has a large selection of rental bikes for $3 (£2) per hour, $11 (£7.45) up to 6 hours, and $14 (£9.45) for a full day. They also guide a number of different mountain-bike trips.

FISHING Anglers typically head to the renowned Río Correntoso for rainbow and brown trout, reached just before crossing the bridge just outside town on Ruta Nacional 231, from the Siete Lagos road. **Banana Fly Shop,** at Arrayanes 282 (✆ **02944/494634**), sells flies and gear, and they provide information and can recommend guides. You may pick up a **fishing license** here or at the Bosques y Parques Provinciales office at the port (✆ **02944/494157**); it's open Monday through Friday from 11am to 4pm, Wednesday until 2pm, Saturday and holidays from 2:30 to 5pm.

HORSEBACK RIDING Hop on a horse and ride up to the top of the ridge for views of all the area lakes. Organized by a well-known local character, **Cabalgatas Correntoso** (✆ **02944/624221;** www.cabalgatacorrentoso.com.ar) has rides from 2 to 9 hours, and overnight pack trips.

SKIING Villa La Angostura is home to a little gem of a ski resort, **Cerro Bayo,** located about 9km (5½ miles) from downtown. It's a smaller resort than the one at Cerro Catedral, but the crowds are thinner and the view is wonderful. For those reasons, I almost prefer it. There are 250 skiable acres. About 40% of the terrain is intermediate, and 35% is advanced. To reach it, you'll need to take a long lift from the base up to the summit; during the summer, this same chairlift provides access to an excellent short hike and lookout point. Cerro Bayo has ski and snowboard rental and instruction; the season runs from mid-June to mid-September, although it can get fairly patchy toward the end of the season.

To get to Cerro Bayo, ask your hotel to arrange transportation or hire a taxi for the short ride. Tickets are $21 to $27 (£14–£18) for adults, $14 to $21 (£9.45–£14) for kids, depending on the season. Kids 5 and under and adults 66 and older ski free. Half-day tickets, 3-day tickets, and weekly passes are also available. For more information, call ✆ **02944/494189** or visit www.cerrobayoweb.com.

WHERE TO STAY

Very Expensive

Las Balsas ★★ One of the greatest inns in the country, the award-winning Relais & Châteaux–affiliated Las Balsas has the airs of a country cottage, and an unbeatable lakefront setting (neighbors are among the wealthiest folk in Argentina). From the moment you walk in, you'll feel relaxed and at home. Common areas range from a big-screen TV room upstairs to a living room with a massive fireplace, comfortable couches, and coffee-table books. With only 15 rooms, this place ensures that guests get away from it all. English-speaking staff members are very charming and attentive without being stuffy or condescending, which enhances the air of exclusivity here. There is a strong focus on details, from fresh orange slices by the pool to imported teas. Rooms are generally small—this inn was built long before the McMansion-style hotel trends of late—but they make up for their limited size with character. Each room is different, and all have bright

Tips Driving to Chile

Villa la Angostura is the last stop before you head over the Andes and on to Chile via Paso Cardenal Samore, also known as **Paso Puyehue.** The border itself is 64km (39 miles) from town, although driving eastward, you'll hit the Argentine Customs building at 34km (21 miles). It's a spectacular drive through virgin forests in two adjoining national parks (Nahuel Huapi in Argentina and Puyehue in Chile). There are lovely picnic spots and short hiking trails en route. In winter, the drive often requires chains. The border crossing itself involves first exiting Argentina and then entering Chile. Across the border, you're within an hour of lovely spots such as the Thermas de Puyehue hot springs and the delicious seafood restaurants in the city Puerto Montt on the Pacific Coast. Either makes a great day trip from Bariloche or Villa La Angostura. Remember, though, that the border closes at 11pm in summer and at 8pm in winter. If you are renting a car, be sure to tell the rental agency that you plan to drive to Chile—if you reach the border without the proper paperwork, you will have to turn back.

windows overlooking the lake; none have televisions. Floors are a bit squeaky on the ground floor. The inn's restaurant is world-class. The spa next door doesn't quite match the inn, and the gym should be moved out of the tranquil relaxation area, but the services are specialized and indulgent. Most things, from the food to the excursions, are very expensive here. Nonguests can enjoy a memorable lakeside lunch at the restaurant.

Bahía Las Balsas. ✆/fax **02944/494308.** w www.lasbalsas.com.ar. 15 units. $480 (£325) double; $640 (£433) suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Exquisite restaurant; bar; lounge; indoor/outdoor heated pool; spa; sauna; watersports equipment; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* Coffeemaker, hair dryer.

Expensive

Correntoso Lake and River Hotel Kids Perched above the mouth of the Correntoso River and facing due west across to the Andes, the Correntoso Hotel was founded in 1922 as a fishing destination for Bariloche residents who crossed the lake by boat. Now it feels like a clean, natural, and fresh mountain lodge. The lobby is stunning, with glass ceilings, large leather couches, and an enormous fireplace. The huge library has big sofas, heritage maps, and another fireplace. The gourmet restaurant is open to the public and worth a visit for the views alone—hotel guests have access to the choicest tables. Down at the dock, there is another charming but less formal restaurant. The property is full of walking trails and berry bushes. All but six of the rooms have fabulous views over the lake. Corner room nos. 309 and 409 have the very best views. There's a lovely new spa with a gorgeous indoor/outdoor pool, and 16 new suites tucked behind the spa. This is a complete hotel experience and the most family-friendly of the upscale options in the area.

Ruta 234 and Río Correntoso, Villa la Angostura. ✆/fax **02944/15-619728** (cell). www.correntoso.com. 49 units. $287–$353 (£194–£239) double; $382–$470 (£258–£318) suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; lounge; heated outdoor pool; spa; concierge; deck; Wi-Fi. *In room:* TV, fridge (in suites only).

El Faro ★★ The owners of this refined inn aren't the only ones who think Nahuel Huapi Lake resembles the sea. So inspired by the mariner vibe, they've built a hotel around a lighthouse. It's a classy inn through and through, mature, relaxing, and polished. The rooms are all very large, with crisp white curtains, giant king-size beds, standalone showers, and jetted tubs. Most have fireplaces. The "boutique" rooms are the most economical. Ask for a superior with a terrace. There are three suites, including one inside the lighthouse. A lovely buffet breakfast is served in a sunny room overlooking the lake, and in summer can be enjoyed on the outside deck. The spa, renovated at the end of 2008, is divine. If you want a big room, you are much better off here than at Las Balsas (above). For a stunningly romantic dinner, book the single table at the top of the lighthouse.

Av. Siete Lagos 2345, Villa la Angostura. ✆ **02944/495484.** www.elfaropatagonia.com. 15 rooms. Doubles $259–$350 (£175–£237); suites $365–$443 (£247–£300). Rates include breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Heated outdoor pool; small gym; spa; concierge; room service; Wi-Fi. *In room:* A/C, minibar, safe.

Hostería Puerto Sur ★ The best of a slew of new wood-framed inns that have taken over the formerly exclusive Bahia Manzano area, Puerto Sur is smart. Built into the hill, each room has expansive lake views. The bottom floor has a spa area with an indoor/outdoor pool, gym, and large sauna. All rooms have large bathrooms with big tubs beneath glass ceilings. Rooms on the outside corner have nice private decks, where you can enjoy breakfast if you reserve one ahead of time. Furniture is soft cotton. The bistro-styled restaurant has a cute wine cellar. They have good promotions for 5-night stays.

Los Pinos 221, Puerto Manzano. ✆/fax 02944/475224. www.hosteriapuertosur.com.ar. 14 units. $188 (£127) double; $202 (£137) double with deck. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. Amenities: Restaurant; lounge; heated outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; sauna; massage; dock; private beach; TV room. In room: TV, safe.

Moderate

Hostería El Establo ★ Finds A lovely inn steps from the heart of town, El Establo is a charming oasis, with a lovely garden and warm service. Inspired by pioneers, there is much history on display here—a stable was once situated on the same spot. Inside, the lounge area is spacious and cozy, with a large fireplace and giant sofas. Upstairs, rooms are full of wooden charm, reminiscent of a cottage. Fabrics change room to room, but maintain a country feel. Premium rooms are just a bit bigger, with corner windows and a Jacuzzi. Suites are very spacious with a giant white bed and a sunny bathroom. Breakfasts here are legendary for their abundance. It's only a block from the main drag.

Los Maquis 56, Villa La Angostura. ✆ **02944/494142.** www.hosteriaelestablo.com.ar. 14 rooms. $114 (£77) double; $144 (£97) premium double; $203 (£137) suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Lounge; concierge; game room; laundry; Wi-Fi. *In room:* TV, safe.

Hostería Las Cumbres Value If you are looking for an informal option that's a step up from a hostel, this is a good choice. Eight rooms all have simple private bathrooms (three have tubs, the rest have showers only), bright windows, whiteboard walls, and tiny TVs. Upstairs rooms, including a triple, have high ceilings. The quad is great value for a family. The common space is rustic and woodsy, and has good vibes and a big fireplace. The owner, who everyone knows as "El Mono," is a snowboarder who sets an easygoing atmosphere. They don't accept credit cards.

Confluencia 944, Av. Siete Lagos, 1km (2/3 mile) west of the Cruce, Villa la Angostura. ✆ **02944/494945.** www.hosterialascumbres.com. 8 units. $59 (£40) double; $67 (£45) triple; $105 (£71) quad. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Concierge; lounge. *In room:* TV.

Many *parrillas* and cafes line the town's sole main street. The best, however, are either on side streets or are a few minutes' drive outside town. For a cheap meal where the locals eat, try the typical grill-house *parrilla* **El Esquiador,** Las Retamas 146 (✆ **02944/494331**). It's almost always packed.

La Delfina ★ CONTEMPORARY ARGENTINE Tucked inside a cozy old cottage next to the La Escondida Inn at the Bahia Manzano community, La Delfina is a gourmet revelation and full of surprises. The menu changes virtually daily to reflect the chef's whimsical tastes, but staples include a spectacular steak with teriyaki sauce and shiitake mushrooms, and a trio of trout. The smoked-trout soup with lime cream is also fabulous. During the summer, you can dine outdoors.

Av. Arrayanes 714, Puerto Manzano. ✆ **02944/475313.** Reservations highly recommended. Main courses $16–$25 (£11–£17). AE, MC. Tues–Sun noon–3:30pm and 8:30–11:30pm. Closed for lunch in winter.

La Encantada (Finds) PIZZA This may be the best pizza joint in the Lake District. The trademark here is the thin crusts cooked in the wood-burning oven. Toppings are fresh and creative, including my favorite: arugula, mozzarella, tomato, and olive oil. Another option combines locally smoked salmon with parsley and mozzarella. The menu also includes some unusual empanadas such as one stuffed with rainbow trout, white wine, and hard-boiled eggs. Soups, salads, and pastas are also available. It's a cozy and fun place with great service.

C. Belvedere 69. ✆ **02944/495436.** Main courses $7.50–$13 (£5.05–£8.80). No credit cards. Tues–Sun 12:30–3:30pm and 8–11:30pm.

Tinto Bistro ★★ FUSION Everything sparkles inside the Tinto Bistro. The lighting is intimate, and the decor is deluxe. Chef Leonardo Andres's food manages to shine as well. An eclectic offering of tapas includes rabbit *escabeche* with endives. The main courses reflect a global palate, with Asian, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean influences—from garlic-and–lemon grass chicken to Saigon beef and udon noodles with sautéed seafood in vodka-saffron sauce and coconut milk. It's a very exciting and refreshing change, perhaps a bit too spicy for most Argentine palates but interesting to many travelers. A wide selection of *vino tinto,* with more than 150 labels, honors the restaurant's name. For dessert, try Princesa Mia, a honey parfait with flambéed fruits—named, perhaps, after the owner's celebrity sister, Princess Maxima of Holland. There's now a second location inside Bariloche's Panamericano Hotel, which unfortunately lacks the same cozy vibe.

Bd. Nahuel Huapi 34, at end of Arrayanes. ✆ **02944/494924.** Reservations highly recommended in high season. MC, V. Main courses $12–$19 (£8.20–£13). Mon–Sat 8pm–midnight.

Waldhaus SWISS/REGIONAL This little restaurant's gingerbread eaves, notched furniture, and woodsy location will make you feel such as though you're dining in the Black Forest. The location, 6km (3 3/4 miles) from downtown, makes the Waldhaus less convenient than its main competitor, Rincón Suiza, but the food is slightly better here. In addition to nightly specials, typical menu offerings include wild-mushroom soup, beef fondue, venison marinated in burgundy wine, and typical Tyrolean dishes such as spaetzle with ham.

Ruta Nacional 231, Km 61. ✆ **02944/495123.** Main courses $11–$19 (£7.45–£13). MC, V. Summer and winter daily noon–3:30pm and 8pm–midnight; spring and fall daily 8pm–midnight.

4 DRIVING BARILOCHE TO SAN MARTIN ★★

There are four ways to get from Bariloche to San Martín de los Andes. Each has its pros and cons. All head northeast of Bariloche on RN 237, however, with lovely picnic spots and stunning scenery along the way. If you continue along the Limay River, you'll journey past the river's impressive Amphiteatre and the Valle Encantado, with rare volcanic rock formations, including the Dedo de Dios (Finger of God).

The only fully paved route takes you along the gorgeous Limay River to Rinconada and then loops to San Martín via **Junín de los Andes.** This route is the longest, at 260km (161 miles), but it's the one I recommend for safety if you are traveling in winter or at night.

The second route takes you also along the Limay River but then heads west on a gravel road just past Confluencia and over the incredibly wild and rugged **Córdoba Pass** before joining the traditional Seven Lakes Route, RP 234. This also takes you past the picturesque Meliquina Lake, where you'll find a teahouse and general store. Soon after Meliquina, turn right on RP 231, the Ruta de los Siete Lagos (see below), to continue to San Martín de los Andes. Turn left to return to Villa la Angostura.

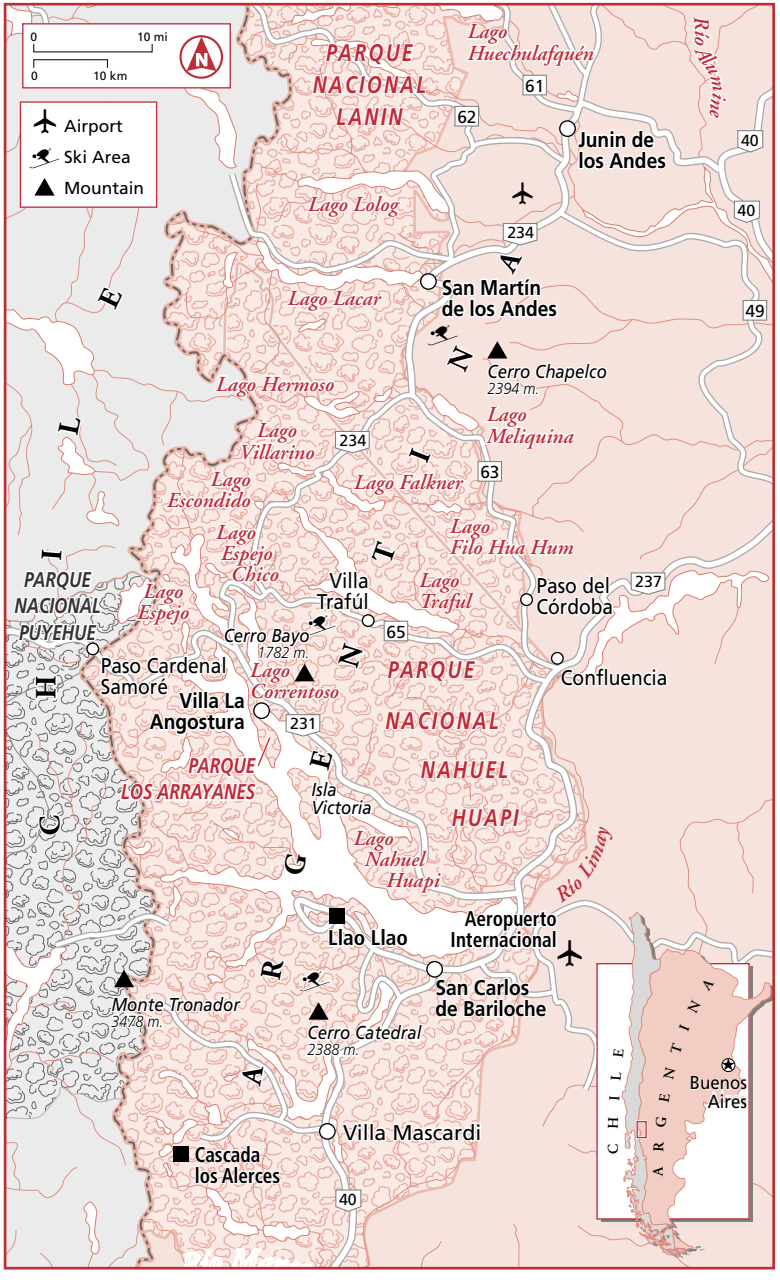
The route that heads through **Villa Traful** at RP 65 can also be done as the "Circuito Grande," a nice day drive from Bariloche, looping through Villa La Angostura. At Confluencia, you head west along the Traful River past the expansive Estancia Primavera, owned by a certain gringo by the name of Ted Turner. It then catches up to RP 231, the Ruta de los Siete Lagos. Again, it's a right turn to San Martín de los Andes and a left turn to Villa la Angostura. The Circuito Grande is 240km (148 miles) total, looping from Bariloche.

Numerous daily buses link along these roads as well. Campers can hop on and off at their own pace.

The classic **Ruta de Los Siete Lagos (Seven Lakes Route),** is a direct trip from Villa La Angostura to San Martín de los Andes. This road is now mostly paved, 184km (114 miles) from Bariloche, although road work continues at a snail's pace. This route affords many excellent lookouts, short hikes, and picnic spots. You certainly need a full day to complete the drive to San Martín and back to Villa la Angostura. After leaving the shores of Nahuel Huapi Lake and the town of Villa La Angostura on RP 231, turn north on RP 234. The lakes actually amount to more than seven, starting with Correntoso, Espejo, and Espejo Chico. At the juncture of lakes Villarino and Falkner, the rustic **Hostería Lago Villarino** (✆ **02972/427483**) is one of the only places to spend the night en route, besides numerous campgrounds. Shortly thereafter, you cross the border into Lanín National Park. You can check Hermoso, Machónico, and Lácar lakes off your list before

Moments Villa Traful: A Timeless Mountain Hide-Out

On what is often referred to as the Circuito Grande (opposed to the Circuito Chico that takes you to the Llao Llao), the delightful little village of Villa Traful makes a great day trip from either Bariloche or Villa la Angostura. This lakeside settlement 63km (39 miles) north of Villa La Angostura is home to some 300 people, many descendants of original settlers. The town includes teahouses, campgrounds, and a few cabins for those who want to spend the night.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PARQUE NACIONAL LANIN
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Río Alumine
Junin de los Andes
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Lago Lacar
San Martín de los Andes
Cerro Chapelco 2394 m.
Lago Hermoso
Lago Meliquina
Lago Villarino
Lago Escondido
Lago Falkner
Lago Filo Hua Hum
Lago Espejo Chico
Lago Espejo
PARQUE NACIONAL PUYEHUE
Villa Trafúl
Lago Traful
Paso del Córdoba
Cerro Bayo 1782 m.
Paso Cardenal Samoré
Lago Correntoso
Villa La Angostura
Confluencia
PARQUE NACIONAL NAHUEL HUAPI
PARQUE LOS ARRAYANES
Isla Victoria
Lago Nahuel Huapi
Río Limay
Llao Llao
Aeropuerto Internacional
San Carlos de Bariloche
Monte Tronador 3478 m.
Cerro Catedral 2388 m.
Villa Mascardi
Cascada los Alerces
CHILE
ARGENTINA
Buenos Aires
61
62
234
40
49
63
65
231
237

dropping into the town of San Martín de los Andes. On the shores of the Rio Hermoso is the outstanding Rio Hermoso Lodge (see "Where to Stay" under "San Martín de los Andes," below).

5 SAN MARTIN DE LOS ANDES ★★

1,640km (1,017 miles) SW of Buenos Aires; 200km (124 miles) N of San Carlos de Bariloche

San Martín de los Andes is a charming mountain town of 35,000 nestled on the tip of Lago Lácar between high peaks. The town is considered the tourism capital of the Neuquen province, a claim that's hard to negate, considering the copious arts-and-crafts shops, gear-rental shops, restaurants, and hotels that constitute much of downtown. San Martín has grown considerably in the past 15 years, yet a city law that limits building height and regulates architectural style means the town has kept its lovely character, unlike Bariloche. The town is quieter than Bariloche and decidedly more picturesque, thanks to its timber-heavy architecture and Swiss Alpine influence. Because it's in a valley between two peaks, however, it lacks the majestic lake view and can feel dark and closed-in. San Martín overflows with activities including biking, hiking, boating, and skiing. The town is also very popular for hunting and fishing—and, believe it or not, some come just to relax. The tourism infrastructure here is excellent, with every lodging option imaginable and plenty of great restaurants.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

BY PLANE **Aeropuerto Internacional Chapelco** (✆ **02972/428388**) sits halfway between San Martín and Junín de los Andes (see later in this chapter) and, therefore, serves both destinations. **Aerolíneas Argentinas/Austral,** Capitán Drury 876 (✆ **02972/427871;** www.aerolineas.com.ar), flies from Buenos Aires. A new airline, **SUR Líneas Aéreas** (✆ **11/5278-6367** in Buenos Aires; www.surla.com.ar), began twice-weekly service in 2009. The hope is that recent improvements in the airport's infrastructure will keep the number of flights canceled due to bad weather to a minimum. A taxi to San Martín costs about $22 (£15); transfer services are also available at the airport for $18 (£12) per person. A taxi to Junín de los Andes costs $20 (£14); transfer services are $12 (£8.20) per person. **By Mich Rent a Car** and **Avis** both have auto rental kiosks at the airport.

BY BUS The **Terminal de Omnibus** is at Villegas and Juez del Valle (✆ 02972/427044). **Via Bariloche** (✆ 02972/422800) runs daily bus service to San Martín de los Andes from Buenos Aires (a 19-hr. trip). **Ko-Ko Chevalier** (✆ 02972/411295) also offers service to and from Buenos Aires, and serves Villa La Angostura and Bariloche by the paved or by the scenic Siete Lagos route. **Centenario** (✆ 02972/427294) has service to Chile and also offers daily service to Buenos Aires; Villarrica- and Pucón-bound buses leave Monday through Saturday, and those for Puerto Montt depart Tuesday through Thursday. **Albus** (✆ 02972/423808 or 02944/423552) has trips to Bariloche via the Siete Lagos route (about 3 hr.). Bus service can vary due to season, and it's best to evaluate a coach's condition and services before buying a ticket, especially for trips to and from Buenos Aires.

BY CAR As outlined above in "Driving Bariloche to San Martín," San Martín de los Andes can be reached from San Carlos de Bariloche following one of four routes. The popular 200km (124-mile) Siete Lagos route takes rutas 234, 231, and 237, and sometimes closes during the winter (see above). The 160km (99-mile) Paso Córdoba route takes rutas 234, 63, and 237; the longest, yet entirely paved 260km (161-mile) Collón Curá route follows rutas 234, 40, and 237. If driving at night, take the paved route. To get to Neuquén (420km/260 miles), take rutas 234, 40, and 22. From Chile, take the Tromen Pass (132km/82 miles from Pucón) to Ruta 62, taking you to Ruta 234 and through Junín de los Andes; note that a large portion of this route is on unpaved roads.

Getting Around

San Martín is compact enough to explore by foot. For outlying excursions, tour companies can arrange transportation. **El Sol Rent a Car,** Av. San Martín 461 (✆ **02944/421870**), will drop a car off in Junín de los Andes (see later in this chapter). **Hertz Rent a Car** is at Av. San Martín 831 (✆ **02972/430280**), and **Nieves Rent-A-Car** is at Villegas 668 (✆ **02972/428684**).

Note that two main streets have similar names and can be confusing: Perito Moreno and Mariano Moreno.

Visitor Information

San Martín's excellent **Oficina de Turismo** (✆/fax **02972/427347** or 02972/427695) offers comprehensive accommodations listings with prices and other tourism-related information, and the staff is friendly and eager to make your stay pleasurable. The office is open daily 8am to 8pm, at Rosas and Avenida San Martín, on the main plaza. The **Asociación Hotelero y Gastronomía,** San Martín 1234 (✆ **02972/427166**), also offers lodging information, including photographs of each establishment, though service is not as efficient as it is at the Oficina de Turismo. During the off season, it's open daily from 9am to 1pm and 3 to 7pm; during high season, it's open daily from 9am to 10pm.

For information on Parque Nacional Lanín, drop by the park's information center, open daily 9am to noon only, or visit **www.parquenacionallanin.gov.ar**.

A website chock-full of valuable information is **www.smandes.gov.ar**.

Fast Facts San Martín de los Andes

Banks & Currency Exchange **Andina International,** Capitán Drury 876, exchanges money; banks such as **Banco de la Nación,** Av. San Martín 687; **Banco de la Provincia Neuquén,** Belgrano and Obeid; and **Banco Frances,** Av. San Martín and Sarmiento, have ATMs and money exchange. All banks are open Monday through Friday from 10am to 3pm.

Emergency Dial ✆ **107.**

Hospital **Hospital Regional Ramón Carrillo** is at Avenida San Martín and Coronel Rodhe (✆ **02972/427211**).

Laundry The most convenient laundromats are **La verap Santa Ana,** Belgrano 618 (✆ **02972/421898**), and **Laverap Drury,** Drury 880 (✆ **02972/428820**).

Police For emergencies, dial ✆ **101.** The federal police station is at Av. San Martín 915 (✆ **02972/428249**); the provincial police station is at Belgrano 635 (✆ **02972/427300**).

Post Office **Correo Argentino** is at the corner of General Roca and Coronel Pérez (✆ **02972/427201**).

Taxi **Eco-taxi** (✆ **02972/428421**) has a stand at Plaza San Martín.

Telephone & Internet The fastest computers are at **Cooperativa Telefónica,** Capitán Drury 761, open from 9am to 11pm, where you can also make phone calls. One half-hour of Internet use costs less than $2 (£1.35).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

San Martín de los Andes's heritage is in agriculture, cattle, and logging, all of which are carefully displayed at the **Museo de los Primeros Pobladores,** J. M. Rosas 750 (no phone), open on Tuesday and Friday afternoons only. Now San Martín is heavily geared toward tourism; accordingly, its streets are lined with shops selling arts and crafts, wonderful regional specialties such as smoked meats and cheeses, outdoor gear, books, and more. There is a lovely crafts market open most afternoons in the central plaza. Visitors will find most shops on **Avenida San Martín** and **General Villegas.** For regional specialties and/or chocolates, try **Ahumadero El Ciervo,** General Villegas 724 (✆ **02972/427361**); **Mamusia,** San Martín 601 (✆ **02972/427560**); or **Su Chocolate Casero,** Villegas 453 (✆ **02972/427924**). For arts and crafts, try **Cooperativa De Artesano,** Av. San Martín 1050 (✆ **02972/429097**), or **La Oveja Negra,** Av. San Martín 1025 (✆ **02972/428039**).

San Martín is a mountain town geared toward outdoor activities. If you're not up to a lot of physical exertion, take a stroll down to the lake and kick back on the beach. Alternatively, rent a bike and take a slow pedal around town. Pack a picnic lunch and head to Hua Hum.

The vast **Parque Nacional Lanín,** founded in 1937, is the third-largest national park in the country. It has 35 lakes, as well as thick forests, abundant wildlife, and an extinct volcano. The park is still home to more than 50 native Mapuche communities.

Just up the hill above town, the quaint and cozy **Arrayán Tea House** ★, Circuito Arrayán, Km 4 (✆ **02972/425570**), has the area's best view. Built at a clearing in a cypress forest in 1938 by Renee Dickenson, a spirited young British woman, the house today maintains the same style that first charmed local residents. During the '40s and '50s, this was the hot spot in San Martín, on the old road to Bariloche. Today it's open afternoons for exquisite teas, coffees, and pastries, and for lunch and dinner with a reservation only. Take a taxi up for $5 (£3.40) and walk down.

The **Red Bus** (✆ **02972/421185**) runs city tours on a double-decker bus that helps orient visitors and gives a glimpse into the town's history. Tours depart daily at 10:30am and 4:30pm from the Plaza San Martín. The tour costs $12 (£8.20).

Tour Operators & Travel Agencies

Both **Huemul Turismo,** Av. San Martín 881 (✆ 02972/422903; www.huemulturismo.com.ar), and **Pucará,** Av. San Martín 941 (✆ **02972/427218;** pucara@smandes.com.ar), offer similar tours and prices, and also operate as travel agencies for booking plane tickets.

Lahuen Co: Hot Springs Deep in the Andes

Turn west halfway between San Martín de los Andes and Junín de los Andes, head deep into the temperate rainforest of Lanín National Park, over petrified lava flow, past glistening lakes and snowcapped peaks, and you'll end up at this spectacular oasis. The **Lahuen Co** ★★ thermal hot springs is a natural thermal spa with boutique services and amenities. There are seven thermally heated pools, four indoors and three out. A typical day here begins with a stunning boat trip across Lago Huechulafquén, beneath the Lanín Volcano, then a hike to a waterfall followed by an hour or so to soak and drift and relax in an Asian-inspired building with Vichy showers and a sunny deck. A lovely lunch is served to guests in robes. Afternoons involve a shiatsu massage, some fishing, or more soaking. The landscape is divine, and the new building delicately blends modernity, ancient practices, and nature. They are also open in winter, and have a hotel that'll open in early 2009. Booking in advance is mandatory. Contact their office in San Martín at ✆ **02972/424709** or online at www.lahuenco.com.

Excursions to the village Quila Quina, via a sinuous road that offers dramatic views of Lago Lácar, cost $14 (£9.45); a longer excursion including Chapelco and Arrayán is $18 (£12). Scenic drives through the Siete Lagos route are $32 (£22) to Villa La Angostura and $45 (£30) to Bariloche. A gorgeous circuit trip to Volcán Lanín and Lago Huechulafquén goes for $45 (£30). Tours do not include lunch, which must be brought along or arranged ahead of time.

Outdoor Activities

BIKING San Martín is well suited for biking, and shops offer directions and maps. Bike rentals and tours are available at **Andes Bike,** at Avenida Costanera and Villegas (✆ **02972/15-552475** [cell]). You can rent a bike from **Mountain Snow Shop,** Av. San Martín 861 (✆ **02972/427728**).

BIRD-WATCHING Horacio Matarasso is a passionate birder who hosts great bird-watching trips out of San Martín. Contact him at **Aves Patagonia** (✆ **02972/15-568427** [cell]; www.avespatagonia.com.ar).

BOATING **Naviera Lácar & Nonthué,** at the Costanera and main pier (✆ **02972/427380**), offers year-round boat excursions on Lago Lácar. A full-day excursion to Hua Hum includes a short navigation through Lago Nonthué. The cost is $45 (£30); there's a restaurant in Hua Hum, or you can bring a picnic lunch. Naviera also operates three daily ferry services to the beautiful beaches of Quila Quina (which are packed in the summer) for $12 (£8.20). Naviera also rents kayaks for $10 (£6.80) per hour.

To raft the Hua Hum or the Aluminé rivers, get in contact with Tiempo Tours or Pucará (see "Tour Operators & Travel Agencies," above).

DIVING For lake dives, including first-timers, stop by the lakefront **Buceo de los Andes,** Costanera and Obeid (✆ **02972/15-696838** [cell]).

FISHING INFORMATION & LICENSES **Jorge Trucco,** Ten. Col. Perez 662 (✆ **02972/429561;** www.jorgetrucco.com), organizes day and overnight fishing expeditions to the Meliquina, Chimehuín, and Malleo rivers, among other areas. The other local fishing expert is **Alberto Cordero** (✆ **02972/421453;** www.ffandes.com), who will arrange fishing expeditions around the area. He speaks fluent English; for more information, visit his website. You can pick up a fishing guide at the **Oficina Guardafauna,** General Roca 849 (✆ **02972/427091**).

GOLF The new 18-hole golf course at the **Chapelco Golf & Resort** (✆ **02972/427713;** www.chapelcogolf.com), just north of San Martín, was designed by Jack Nicklaus and his son. It's being called the "best course in Argentina" and is part of an impressive new resort and country club (see "Where to Stay," below). A full round of 18 holes starts at $50 (£34).

HORSEBACK RIDING Take a trip with some local gauchos at the **Estancia Chapelco** (✆ **02972/411253;** www.chapelcogolf.com). A 2-hour trip costs $60 (£41). For $150 (£101), you get a 4-hour ride and a giant *asado* barbecue. The scenery is beautiful.

KAYAKING The dozens of lakes near San Martín practically call out for kayakers. **Paralelo 40 Expediciones** (✆ **02972/428213;** www.paralelo40.com.ar) organizes full-day and half-day outings in touring or sea kayaks.

MOUNTAINEERING The guides at **Lanín Expedition** (✆ **02972/429799;** www.laninexpediciones.com) have decades of experience and offer climbing and orientation courses; ascents of Volcán Lanín and Volcán Domuyo; and treks, climbs, and overnight trips in Lanín and Nahuel Huapi national parks. They have creative itineraries for mountaineering.

SKIING The principal winter draw for San Martín de los Andes is **Cerro Chapelco,** one of the premier ski resorts in South America. Just 20km (12 miles) outside town, Cerro Chapelco is known for its plentiful, varying terrain and great amenities. Although popular, the resort isn't as swamped with skiers as Bariloche is. Instead it draws more families. The resort sports one gondola (which takes skiers and visitors to the main lodge), five chairlifts, and five T-bars. The terrain is 40% beginner, 30% intermediate, and 30% advanced/expert. Chapelco offers excellent bilingual ski instruction, ski and snowboard rental, and special activities such as dog sledding. The resort has open-bowl skiing and tree skiing, and numerous restaurants with an alpine theme. To get here without renting a car, ask your hotel to arrange transportation or hire a *remise* (private taxi).

To drive to the resort from town, follow Route 234 south along Lago Lácar; it's paved except for the last 5km (3 miles). Lift tickets are quite reasonable and vary from low to high season. A 3-day ticket runs $90 to $158 (£61–£107) for adults, and $60 to $108 (£41–£73) for kids. During the summer, the resort is open for hiking and sightseeing, with lift access. For more information, call ✆ **02972/427460** or visit www.sanmartindelosandes.com. The road is usually passable, but you may need chains during heavy snowfall; check before heading up to the resort.

For packages or guided trips with bilingual ski guides, contact **PowderQuest** tours (✆ **888/565-7158** in North America; www.powderquest.com).

WHERE TO STAY

If you arrive in town without a reservation, your first stop should be the Oficina de Turismo (see above), next to the main plaza, which has an updated list of availabilities and prices. Rates almost double in most places from December 18 to March 1. For more information, go to **www.sanmartindelosandes.gov.ar**.

El Casco Viejo Patagonia Lodge ★★ (Finds) There are only three rooms at this little gem of a fishing lodge run by the smiling Taylor sisters, whose grandfather, an immigrant from Texas, owned the entire Chapelco resort until a few years ago. The lodge is a new building that replicates the old family homestead entirely, with heaps of heart and soul. It's at a truly treasured location, at a bend in the gentle Quiluihue River with a fabulous fishing hole right in front. Rooms are very spacious, with a lush farmhouse style, giant beds, and lots of windows. Food is typical country cooking, delicious and unpretentious. The best moments are at sunset, when the fish are jumping, the fresh-baked cakes are being served, and silence prevails. Besides fly-fishing, there are horseback riding and trekking activities (as well as an 18-hole golf course) right out the door. Rates include all meals and transfers. The lodge also is open to the public as a teahouse with reservations.

Ruta 234, Km 57.5, Loma Atravesada de Taylor, San Martín de los Andes. ✆ **02972/411253.** www.chapelcogolf.com. 3 units. $240 (£162). MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; horseback riding; library. *In room:* Safe.

Loi Suites Chapelco ★ Opened in February 2008, this is the first five-star hotel in San Martín, hugely important for the town. The location, with sunset views across the golf course, is lovely. The hotel has a business feel to it, with long corridors, empty spaces and formal (albeit excellent) service. Rooms have Asian-inspired details, particularly in the modern, massive bathrooms. Furniture is chunky and heavy, and wool, leather, and hide predominate in accents. Only two of the junior suites and most of the studios have decks; the lofts are cozy. The spa focuses on water-based treatments. Laminate floors, thin doors, and mediocre amenities keep the Loi from being a true five-star. But the lovely views, excellent restaurant, and slew of activities make it the best place to stay in the area.

Ruta 234, Km 57.5, San Martín de los Andes. ✆ **02972/410304** or 11/5777-8950 in Buenos Aires. www.loisuites.com.ar. 85 units. $170–$196 (£94–£108) double; $450–$625 (£303–£422) suite. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; lounge; wine cellar; indoor/outdoor pool; golf course; spa; game room; horseback riding; conference center. *In room:* TV, minibar, safe.

Rio Hermoso Lodge ★★ (Finds) Sometimes a place just gets it right. There is sublime luxury to be had at this delightful mountain lodge that's on the Seven Lakes Road south of San Martín de los Andes. It's natural without being rustic, peaceful without being too isolated. A gentle river streams by, birds chirp above, and one feels deeply relaxed. Inside, the background color is white, but with the presence of much wood and the dotting of such bright colors as purple, yellow, and pink, the lodge feels alive and energetic. Rooms have giant windows overlooking the greenery. Bathrooms are a mixture of wood and stone, with large windows. A suite upstairs is ideal for families. Outside, there are paths leading through lush forests. This lodge also makes a good coffee break if you are driving the Seven Lakes Road. Just call first.

Ruta 63, Km 67, Paraje Rio Hermoso (2km/1¼ miles south of San Martín, just off the Seven Lakes Rd.). ✆ **02972/410485.** www.riohermoso.com. $250–$350 (£169–£236) double. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; library; TV room; Wi-Fi. *In room:* Safe.

Ten Rivers and Ten Lakes Lodge ★ (Moments) With undoubtedly the best view in all of San Martín, this tiny and cozy log-and-stone lodge is secluded and romantic. Next to the lovely Arrayán teahouse, where fabulous breakfasts are served, this boutique inn originally opened as a lodge for fly-fishers. They still have excellent fishing packages, but

anyone is welcome to spend a few nights in the four rooms. Few do, however. The inn opens only upon request. Rooms are decorated with an understated luxury that will appeal to nature lovers, as will the absence of TVs. Big tubs, big beds, big windows, and still-unpretentious style characterize the interiors. Each has a lovely patio with Adirondack chairs and views across Lake Lacar.

Cerro Diaz, Ruta de los Arrayanes. ✆ **011/5917-7710** in Buenos Aires. www.tenriverstenlakes.com. 4 units. $230 (£155) double; $310 (£209) suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; TV room.

Moderate

Hostería La Casa de Eugenia ★ (Finds) Built in 1927, this lovely old building with bright blue trim used to house the local historical society; now it's a bed-and-breakfast. Eugenia has moved to the States, but she smartly left the place in her charming brother Agustín's hands. The delightful living room with its large fireplace, piano, and colorful sofas leads to five bedrooms, named by color. The *verde* (green) has a skylight that keeps it bright throughout the day; all the rooms have comfortable beds with down comforters and exquisite linens, gleaming white bathrooms, and little else. Five new rooms, as of 2007, blend modern amenities and bright colors with the inn's historical feel. There's a small new outdoor pool and Jacuzzi. An amazingly decadent breakfast is served in the bright dining room overlooking a small park.

Colonel Díaz 1186, San Martín de los Andes. ✆ **02972/427206.** www.lacasadeeugenia.com.ar. 9 units. $110–$180 (£74–£121) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Lounge; room service. *In room:* Minibar, no phone.

Hostería Monte Verde A good value, this simple and clean *hostería* is one of the newer inns in town. The lobby is sparsely furnished with a giant stone fireplace. Skiers will like the large and handy ski storage area right at the door. Rooms are large and comfortable, with new beds. Bathrooms are also spacious. All superior rooms have Jacuzzi tubs and fireplaces. Some of the common spaces still need to be filled in, but the staff is friendly, and no one would feel cramped here.

Rivadavia 1165, San Martín de los Andes. ✆ **02972/410129.** www.hosteriamonteverde.com.ar. 16 units. $80–$120 (£54–£81) standard double; $90–$135 (£61–£91) superior double. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; sauna; grill. *In room:* TV, safe.

La Raclette ★ (Finds) The design of this appealing inn is a cross between something you'd find in Morocco and Switzerland—molded white stucco interiors set off by carved wooden shutters and eaves. It might also be described as a Hobbit House—anyone over 6 feet (1.8m) tall might have to stoop, the ceilings upstairs are so low. Impressive renovations in 2007 make it appealing to those who like modern design. On a quiet street, La Raclette has a cozy seating area and a bar and restaurant downstairs. The public areas and the rooms have nooks and crannies and lovely modern art on display. Rooms have charisma, and they are remarkably private considering the small room sizes inherent in an old house like this. All bathrooms have jetted tubs. The hotel exudes a lot of warmth.

Coronel Pérez 1170, San Martín de los Andes. ✆/fax **02972/427664.** www.laraclette.com.ar. 9 units. $85–$98 (£57–£66) double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* TV.

Inexpensive

Hostería Anay (Value) A convenient location, economical price, and simple yet comfortable accommodations make the Anay a good value in San Martín. The rooms come with a double bed or two twins, and triples and apartments are available for four and five guests. Second-floor rooms have wooden ceilings and ruby-red bedspreads, a lamp here

and there, and nothing else, but they're all clean and neat. The bathrooms are older, yet they have huge showers (no bathtubs). Downstairs, the lobby has a large fireplace, a felt-covered game table, and plenty of plants. The sunny, pleasant eating area is a nice spot for breakfast. The hotel is owner operated, with direct and professional service.

Capitán Drury 841, San Martín de los Andes. ✆/fax **02972/427514.** www.interpatagonia.com/anay. 15 units. $50–$65 (£34–£44) double. Rates include continental breakfast. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Lounge; limited room service; babysitting; laundry service. *In room:* TV.

Cabanas

San Martín has more than three dozen cabana complexes, ranging from attached units and detached A-frames to new "apart-hotels." The quality varies somewhat; generally, the real difference between each is size, so always ask if a cabin for four means one bedroom and two fold-out beds in the living room. Cabanas are a great deal for parties of four to six. They're usually less expensive than hotels and come with small kitchens. During the off season, couples will find reasonably priced cabanas; however, many places charge a full six-person price during high season.

On the upscale end ($70/£47 double off season; $210/£142 double high season), try the following: **Claro del Bosque** ★, Belgrano 1083 (✆ **02972/427451;** fax 02972/428434; www.clarodelbosque.com.ar), is a Swiss Alpine–style building tucked away at the end of a street on a wooded lot. The managers are very friendly and accommodating. If they're fully occupied here (which is common), ask about their brand-new complex of charming apartments nearby. In a quiet location close to the water, **Apart del Faldeo,** Cnel. Rohde 1250 (✆ **02972/411317;** www.apartdelfaldeo.com.ar) is new and open year-round.

If you'd like to get out of town, try **Paihuen**'s beautiful stone-and-mortar attached cabanas in a forested lot at Ruta Nacional 234, Km 48 (✆/fax **02972/428154;** www.paihuen.com.ar). It's is an upscale resort-style complex with one of the best wine bars in the area. **Aldea Misonet,** Los Cipreses 1801 (✆/fax **02972/421821;** www.aldeamisonet.com), has wood-and-stone attached units that sit at the edge of town; some units overlook a gurgling stream, as does the terrace.

Note: Prices fluctuate wildly according to who makes the reservation; speak Spanish and you'll likely get a lower rate. Feel free to bargain when making your reservations. Make your final offer if you find the price too high—the owners may very well take whatever you offer, especially during low season.

WHERE TO DINE

San Martín has several excellent restaurants. For sandwiches and quick meals, try **Peuma Café,** Av. San Martín 851 (✆ **02972/428289**); for afternoon tea and delicious cakes and pastries, try **Unser Traum,** General Roca 868 (✆ **02972/422319**). Food is generally more affordable here than in Bariloche, although it lacks both the innovation and the drama.

Expensive

La Tasca ★ REGIONAL La Tasca is a solid choice for its fresh, high-quality cuisine and extensive wine offerings. Regional specialties are the focus, such as venison flambéed in cognac and blueberries, saffron trout, and raviolis stuffed with wild boar. All meats are handpicked from local ranches by the chef-owner, and the organic cheese is made at a local German family's farm. Mushroom lovers will savor the fresh, gourmet varieties

served with appetizers and pasta. Appetizer platters are a specialty here. The cozy restaurant is festooned with hanging hams, bordered with racks of wine bottles, and warmed by a few potbellied iron stoves. It's a bit too bright for a romantic dinner, but great for families, as they have several large tables.

Mariano Moreno 866. ✆ **02972/428663.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $17–$23 (£12–£16). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–3:30pm and 7pm–1am.

Moderate

Caranegra Ku Parrilla ★ (Moments) REGIONAL In a heritage house just north of the downtown core, this is a mountain grill, with trout, lamb, and your usual selection of beef cuts. More-unique meats include venison, wild boar, and buffalo. I loved the sweet-and-sour venison with local fruits. The wine list is one of the best in town. The historical ambience adds style and romance.

Ruta 234 and Callejón de Bello. ✆ **02972/425953.** Reservations recommended in summer. Main courses $18–$22 (£12–£15). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 7pm–midnight.

El Regional BREWPUB/REGIONAL The *picadas* here are massive plates of delicious local nibbles, like smoked meats, olives, cheese, and pickles, served with dip and fresh breadsticks. They're great for sharing. The fish and seafood here is brought in fresh from Chile, making it the best in town. The atmosphere is a bit hectic and harried, but it's definitely unassuming. There are more than 10 different artisan-brewed beers on tap as well. If you get here before 8:30pm for dinner, ask for a discount!

Gral. Villegas 965. ✆ **02982/425326.** Main courses $12–$20 (£8.20–£14). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 7pm–midnight.

La Costa del Pueblo (Kids) INTERNATIONAL This restaurant is a good bet, with a lake view and an extensive menu with everything from pastas to *parrilla.* The establishment ran as a cafe for 20 years until new owners expanded it to include a dozen more tables and a cozy fireside nook. La Costa offers good, homemade pasta dishes such as cannelloni stuffed with ricotta and walnuts, grilled meats, pizzas, and sandwiches. A kids' menu and vegetarian sandwiches help please any crowd. The restaurant is a great place to down a cold beer and a platter of smoked cheese and venison while you watch the lake lap the shore. Just don't come here in a rush; service can be really slow.

Av. Costanera and Obeid. ✆ **02972/429289.** Main courses $12–$22 (£8.20–£15). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–1am.

La Fondue de Betty ★ FONDUE A San Martín classic, Betty's friendly service and bubbling fondue pots make this cozy restaurant an enchanting place for dinner, especially if you are with friends. Cheese fondue is the classic starter. Follow it with either beef bourguignon (beef in oil), which comes with six sauces, or beef chinoise (beef in broth). Both come with french fries. A local favorite is *bagna cauda,* a Northern Italian fondue of anchovies, garlic, and cream, in which you dip vegetables. The menu also includes some nonfondue dishes, such as tenderloin with mushroom sauce and trout with saffron. The wine list is very good. For dessert, don't miss the chocolate fondue, of course!

Villegas 586. ✆ **02972/422522.** Reservations recommended in winter. Main courses $13–$23 (£8.80–£16). No credit cards. Daily 7pm–midnight.

La Reserva ★ (Moments) ARGENTINE This lovely old stone-and-wood house was transformed into one of the most romantic restaurants in Patagonia, with a stone fireplace, elegant cloth-covered tables, soothing music, and superb service. La Reserva is run

by talented Chef Alejandro Marchand, who lets many ethnic cuisines influence him while using mostly Patagonian ingredients. Begin with a cold glass of Argentine champagne to go with an order of tapas—a tasting of cheeses and dried meats. Then move on to grilled trout, tender venison with fresh berry sauce, or chicken breast stuffed with feta cheese and herbs. More than 250 wines are available, including excellent regional wines for under $10 (£6.80) a bottle. Desserts include a divine selection of homemade fruit tarts and ice creams.

Belgrano 940. ✆ **02972/428734.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $13–$18 (£8.80–£12). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 7:30pm–midnight.

Monica Due (Finds) ITALIAN Get to this shady stone house off the main drag before the lovely Italian couple decide to move to another country and open Monica Tre (the first Monica was in Costa Rica!). All pastas are made fresh daily. Try the tortelloni stuffed with ricotta, spinach, and Parmesan, or tonnarelli with a matriciana sauce (bacon, onions, hot chilies, and tomatoes). For dessert, tiramisu or semifreddo, of course!

Rivadavia 759. ✆ **02972/423643.** Main courses $6–$13 (£4.05–£8.80). No credit cards. Daily noon–3pm and 8–11pm.

Inexpensive

La Nonna Pizzería PIZZA La Nonna's pizza, calzones, and empanadas are so good they're sold packaged and ready-to-bake at the supermarket. Toppings generally run the repetitive gamut of ham and onion, ham and pineapple, ham and hearts of palm. But there are a few deviations, such as anchovy, Roquefort, and Parmesan, or mozzarella with chopped egg. La Nonna also offers specialty regional pizzas with trout, wild boar, and deer. Calzone fillings include chicken, mozzarella, and bell pepper. For a quick snack, try one of eight types of empanadas or a piece of *faina,* a traditional and delicious garbanzo bread. La Nonna also delivers.

Capitán Drury 857. ✆ **02972/422223.** $5–$8 (£3.40–£5.40) small pizza; $4–$9 (£2.70–£6.10) large pizza. AE, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 8pm–12:30am.

SAN MARTIN AFTER DARK

With its nice outdoor patio and cool wood and stone interior, the **Dublin South Pub,** on the corner of M. Moreno and San Martín (✆ **02972/424938**), has a huge list of microbrewed beers and cocktails.

6 JUNIN DE LOS ANDES

40km (25 miles) N of San Martín de los Andes

The main draw in the tiny town of Junín de los Andes is fly-fishing. The sport has caught on so well here that even the street signs are shaped like fish. But it also provides stunning scenery for other outdoor sports such as hiking and boating, and some lovely nearby ranches may appeal to those searching for a rural getaway. Junín is spread out in a grid pattern, a fertile little oasis along the shore of the Río Chimehuín, surrounded by dry pampa. You'll pass through Junín if you're crossing into Argentina from the Pucón area in Chile.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

BY PLANE See "Getting There" under "San Martín de los Andes," earlier in this chapter. It is also common for drivers to arrive in Junín from Pucón, Chile, coming over the gorgeous Paso Tromen.

BY BUS **Ko-Ko Chevalier** (✆ **02972/427422**) has service from San Martín de los Andes and Buenos Aires. Ko-Ko also has service to Lago Huechulafquén. The **bus terminal** (✆ **02972/492038**) is at Olarama and Felix San Martín.

Getting Around

Most visitors find that the only real way to get around is to rent a car, although if they've come to fly-fish transportation is generally provided by their guide. Car-rental agencies can be found at the airport and in San Martín (see "Getting Around," under "San Martín de los Andes," earlier in this chapter).

Visitor Information

The **Secretaría Municipal de Turismo** is located at Padre Milanesio 596 (✆ **02972/491160**); it's open daily from 8am to 9pm, from 8am to 11pm during the summer.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

Puerto Canoa is the central entrance to the splendid **Parque Nacional Lanín,** 30km (19 miles) from Junín. Here, you'll find a 30-minute interpretive trail and the departure spot for catamaran excursions across Lago Huechulafquén, which looks out onto the snow-capped, conical Volcán Lanín. See earlier in this chapter, Lahuen Co, for an excellent day trip into the park's interior. Río Chimehuín begins at the lake's outlet and offers outstanding fishing opportunities. Several excellent hiking and backpacking trails traverse the area, with a few rustic backcountry huts; you can pick up information at the ranger station at Puerto Canoa. Towering behind Junín is the park's namesake volcano. Volcán Lanín is 3,776m (12,400 ft.) tall. Experienced mountaineers can mount the summit with a licensed guide (see "Mountaineering," under "San Martín de los Andes," earlier in this chapter). If you're in San Martín de los Andes, stop by the park's headquarters, the **Intendencia Parque Nacional Lanín,** Emilio Frey 749 (✆ **02972/427233**).

Founded in 1883, but populated by native Mapuches for centuries, Junín is one of the older towns in the area. The **Mapuche Museum,** Ginés Ponte 550 (✆ 02972/492322), is worth a stop. Nearby, the **Museo Don Mosés,** C. Juarez and San Marín (no phone), is a turn-of-the-20th-century general store that has been totally preserved. Outside town on the road to Volcán Lanín, you can visit the wool and woodworking workshop of the local native Mapuche people at **Reserva Indígena Chiuquilihuin,** open daily from 9:30am to 7:30pm. Take RP 60 toward Tromen, turning right at Km 13. Local guides also run short hikes in the area. Ask at the workshop for more information or book a tour of the Mapuche villages with **Alquimia Viajes** in San Martín (✆ **02972/491355;** www.alquimiaturismo.com.ar).

FISHING INFORMATION & LICENSES Visitors can obtain licenses at the **Tourism Office,** the office of the Guardafauna (✆ **02972/491277**), open Monday to Friday 8am to 3pm; the **Fly Shop,** Pedro Illera 378 (✆ **02972/491548**); **Bambi's Fly Shop,** Juan Manuel de Rosas 320 (✆ **02972/491167**); or **Patagonia Fly Fishing,** Laura Vicuña 135 (✆/fax **02972/491538**).

Junín de los Andes has a few lodges that specialize in fly-fishing, such as the **Hostería de Chimehuín,** Suarez and Avenida 21 de Mayo, on the shore of the Chimehuín River (✆ **02972/491132;** $12/£8.20 double). Accommodations are basic, including rooms with balconies and apartments, but the atmosphere is friendly and homey, and it has a good breakfast. An excellent fly-fishing lodge is the **San Huberto Lodge,** on a picturesque 20km (13-mile) stretch of the Malleo River (✆ **02972/491238;** www.sanhubertolodge.com.ar), which charges $185 to $280 (£125–£189) for a double, including all meals. The San Humberto consists of six chalets with twin beds, units that are separate from an enormous, rustic lodge. The restaurant is excellent, and so are the fishing guides. Run by a British expat, the similarly rural **Estancia Huechahue** (no phone; www.huechahue.com) is a working cattle ranch open to visitors for daylong and overnight horseback trips. Their eight-room main house doubles as a charming inn. Rates are $356 (£240) per guest per night. They also have interesting multiday horseback-riding expeditions that cross the Andes. **Cerro los Pinos,** Brown 420 (✆ **02972/427207**), is a charming family ranch with close access to the Chimehuín River. Doubles are $12 to $28 (£8.20–£19); they'll arrange a fishing guide for guests. Dining options are limited here; try the **Ruca Hueney,** Milanesio 641 (✆ **02972/491113**), which serves pasta dishes, venison and, of course, trout.

12

Península Valdés & Southern Patagonia

by Christie Pashby

Drawn to its emptiness, its windswept horizons, and its promise of discovery, many adventurers are driven to Patagonia by the sense that it's the end of the world. A traveler can drive for days without seeing another soul on the vast Patagonian Steppe. The unrelenting wind spins your head in circles, and conspires with the emptiness of the landscape to warp your perception of time and distance and convince you that you're the only human left on the planet. It is a seduction, but also an illusion; people do live here, after all—though just a scant few hardy survivors. Sheep still outnumber humans here.

Patagonia's harsh, blustery climate and curious geological circumstances have produced some of the most beautiful natural attractions in the world: the annual congregation of the Southern Right Whale at Península Valdés, the granite towers and expansive glaciers of Los Glaciares National Park, the Southern and Northern Patagonian Ice Fields with their colossal glaciers, and the flat steppe, broken by multicolored sedimentary bluffs. Wildlife lovers and divers explore the rugged coastline of the spectacular Península Valdés; mountaineers stage elaborate excursions through rugged territories, only to be beaten back, like their predecessors, by unrelenting storms.

The area has a fascinating human history as well. Native groups eked out a life in this vast land. European explorers, such as Magellan and FitzRoy, put it on the map. Brave and gutsy settlers turned the emptiness into home. Recently, mountaineers and adventurers have reached amazing heights here. The ample presence of gauchos further heightens the air of romanticism that distinguishes the region.

EXPLORING THE REGION

In Argentina, Patagonia technically begins at the Rio Colorado River, which forms the border between the provinces of La Pampa and Neuquén. Thus, Bariloche is in Patagonia, and that region is known as "Andean Patagonia" or Northern Patagonia. This chapter covers the Atlantic Coastal area and the far south of Patagonia, and also includes Torres del Paine National Park in Chile.

The big challenges in Patagonia are the extreme distances and the weather. Destinations can be upwards of 1,000km (620 miles) apart—and most of those kilometers are on unpaved roads. Yet thanks to modern amenities and air travel, it's nonetheless easy to travel to Patagonia's most compelling areas today. It's entirely feasible to visit such main highlights as Puerto Madryn and Península Valdés on the coast and then head inland to El Calafate and El Chaltén (or reverse), making for a trip that is just over a week long. If you're planning to hike the trails of Los Glaciares National Park, beneath the lofty peaks of Mt. FitzRoy and Cerro Torre, for example, you'll want to spend between 3 and 5 days

in El Chaltén. The minimum amount of time for a worthwhile stop at Península Valdés is 3 days. A quick trip to Argentine Patagonia might include 2 days in El Calafate, 2 in El Chaltén, and 3 in Península Valdés. If you want to work in a trip to Chilean Patagonia, add at least another 5 days.

Prices jump and crowds swell during the summer months, from early November to late March, and some businesses open only during this season. In November, the Península Valdés is busiest with visiting foreigners, who come to see the Southern Right Whales. The southern area around Parque Nacional Los Glaciares is busiest in January and February, but these summer months are not necessarily the best time to visit Patagonia; calmer weather usually prevails in November, and from mid-March to late April, when the leaves turn gold and rust in the autumn air, and winds generally die down a bit.

EXPLORING PENINSULA VALDES/PUERTO MADRYN

In the middle of Atlantic Patagonia, in the vast province of Chubut, lies the remote and barren Península Valdés, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1999.

The bays and shores on this peninsula that juts out into the Atlantic serve as a marine-life preserve for marine mammals such as sea elephants, sea lions, and the enormous Southern Right Whales, which come in from April to December. Penguins and orca whales also swim past. Visitors come here to see the whales and to walk on the beaches and view the unusual sea elephants up close. Diving trips are also popular.

Other animals that run wild here include guanacos (similar to llamas), *maras* (large wild rabbits), *choique* (similar to an ostrich), and a bevy of birds and smaller animals.

The region is very well controlled—in fact, in some areas, beach access is restricted unless you are with a certified "naturalist guide." When whales are in the bays (from July–Dec), beach activities are not allowed. This is a nature preserve, after all, not a playground. Kayaks are allowed from late December to March only, when the whales are gone. Diving is allowed offshore throughout the year, but only on certified boats with government-sanctioned guides.

On the peninsula itself (the entire area is a national park), the tiny village of **Puerto Pirámides** (100km/62 miles from Puerto Madryn) is the departure point for all the whale-watching and diving trips. Some visitors opt to stay overnight here. But most of the tourist infrastructure is in **Puerto Madryn,** a small, laid-back, beachside city of 70,000 people. The town went from a tiny, sleepy hamlet of 6,000 people to a bustling small city that serves as a center for industrial products in eastern Patagonia. It's the most pleasant base for travelers—a jumping-off point for day trips to the peninsula and to **Punta Tombo** (2 hr. south), where Magellan penguins come to mate every year.

The typical visit to this area includes a travel day; then a jampacked day tour of the Península Valdés, which could include whale-watching; and a third day to visit Punta Tombo.

Visitors with more than 3 nights available should consider renting a car and spending a few nights at a rural hotel on the peninsula itself, such as Faro Punta Delgada, or in the beach town at Puerto Pirámides. This will allow you to explore the area away from the crowds, and also to relax. You could consider skipping Punta Tombo if you visit the penguin colony at Estancia San Lorenzo instead, on the northern tip of Península Valdés. A car is necessary to explore the peninsula on your own; there is no public bus system, and distances are vast. Most of the roads are not paved, so a 4WD is a good idea.

Zapala
Neuquen
Bahía Blanca
NEUQUEN
Rio Negro
Rio Colorado
San Martín de los Andes
RIO NEGRO
Parque Nacional Lanin
Mt. Tronador
San Carlos de Bariloche
Viedma
Parque Nacional Nahuel Huapi
PENINSULA VALDES
Puerto Montt
Parque Nacional Lago Puelo
El Maitén
Puerto Madryn
Reserva Faunística Peninsula Valdes
Puerto Pirámides
Rio Chubut
Gaiman
Dolavon
Rawson
Trelew
Parque Nacional Los Alerces
Esquel
Reserva Provincial Punta Tombo
CHUBUT
Rio Chico
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Puerto Aisen
Comodoro Rivadavia
Las Heras
Rio Deseado
Puerto Deseado
SANTA CRUZ
Gobernador Gregores
Mt. Fitzroy
El Chaltén
Rio Chico
Parque Nacional Los Glaciares
Puerto Santa Cruz
PERITO MORENO GLACIER
El Calafate
Parque Nacional Monte Léon
Parque Nacional Torres del Paine
Rio Gallegos
Puerto Natales
Strait of Magellan (Estrecho de Magellanes)
Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas)
Punta Arenas
Porvenir
SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN
Rio Grande
TIERRA DEL FUEGO
Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego
Ushuaia
Cape Horn
CHILE
ARGENTINA
Buenos Aires
0
200 mi
0
200 km
N

The capital of Chubut province is the nearby residential town of **Rawson** (only 20,000 inhabitants), where there's not much to see. Nearby, the bigger city of **Trelew** serves as a gateway to the area, with an airport capable of handling bigger jets. Trelew has a good museum and a few hotels, but it's not of much interest to visitors. The Welsh town of **Gaiman** is much more interesting and makes for an excellent afternoon excursion. Settled primarily from 1865 to 1870, this is one of the few places outside of Wales where Welsh is still spoken. Houses here are reminiscent of those in the Welsh countryside. A handful of teahouses offer traditional tea service (which came in handy when the late Princess Diana visited in 1995).

EXPLORING SOUTHERN ARGENTINE PATAGONIA

The popular image of Patagonia—wind-swept plains, towering granite spires, hardworking pioneers, endless stretches of dirt road—still exists today in the southern part of Argentina. It's way down there, though. The main tourist center is El Calafate, which is 2,727km (1,691 miles) southwest of Buenos Aires. It's easier than ever to get here, however, which means an increasing number of visitors from North America and Europe are making a pilgrimage to see the glaciers, peaks, and emptiness of Patagonia. The two main destinations in southern Argentine Patagonia are El Calafate—the jumping-off point for seeing the beautiful glaciers of Los Glaciares National Park—and El Chaltén, a hiking town at the base of Cerro Torre and Mt. FitzRoy. You could feasibly see this area in a short week, which would give you 2 full travel days to get there and back from Buenos Aires, from where all international flights depart.

Start in El Calafate, and spend a few days exploring the glaciers—Perito Moreno and the more remote ones such as Upsala. Then head to El Chaltén for some hiking; to make it worthwhile, you need at least 1 full day and 2 half-days there.

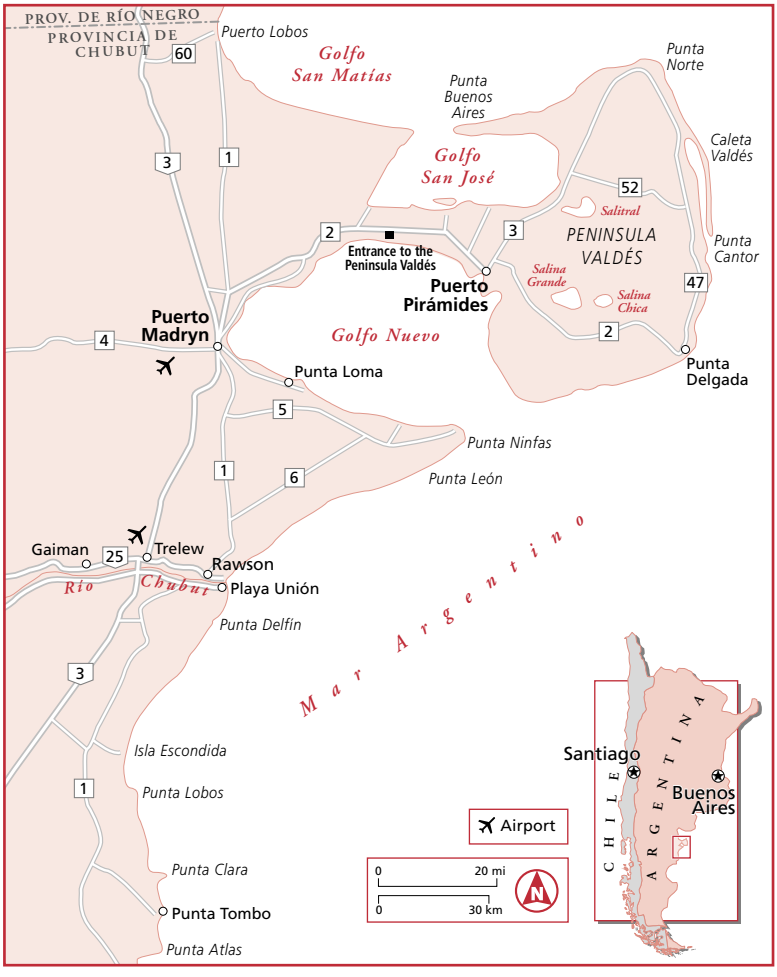
Many people visit this area on a trip combined with Torres del Paine National Park, next door in Chile. It's worthwhile, given that they are so close. "Paine," however, as the park is known here, is much busier and more expensive.

You'll also find a growing list of inns and some very good restaurants. If you're anything like me, you'll find yourself deeply moved and inspired by the vast stretches of wilderness unique to this remote part of the world.

1 PUERTO MADRYN

1,374km (852 miles) S of Buenos Aires; 62km (38 miles) N of Trelew; 1,798km (1,115 miles) N of Ushuaia

A laid-back city of 70,000, Puerto Madryn's population boom came in the mid-1970s. Until then, the city had only 6,000 inhabitants, but the Aloar aluminum factory completely changed the town when it opened its doors here in 1973. Now, there are tile, fish, and ceramic factories on the outskirts of town. Tourism, too, is booming. And Aloar is still expanding. In fact, Puerto Madryn is now one of the fastest-growing cities in Argentina. Mostly used by foreign visitors, the coastal street, Avenida Roca, is lined with restaurants, bars, and hotels. Locals tend to patronize establishments at least 1 block inland. The wide beach is great, with frequently calm waters that make swimming possible from mid-December to mid-March. I also recommend that you take 30 minutes to stroll to the tip of the Old Dock for a great view of the area. The streets a few blocks inland are buzzing with locals. Here you'll find inexpensive clothing stores, and cafes and bars catering



more to residents than to tourists. Very few visitors take the time to walk ar ound here, but it's worth meandering in the residential neighborhood for at least an hour. With the bay shimmering in front, there's an easygoing and relaxed feeling about Puerto Madryn, and you may want to spend an extra day r elaxing here, before continuing your journey.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

BY PLANE **LADE (Líneas Aereas del Estado),** Roca 119 (✆ **2965/451256** or 0810/810-5233), has flights on S unday, Monday, and Thursday from Buenos Aires aboard a small commuter jet (the flight makes one or two stops along the way) for $140 (£94).

Weekly flights depart from Ushuaia (for $235/£159) and El Calafate (for $195/£132). On Thursdays, they fly from Bariloche (for $133/£90). The fares are much cheaper than those of Aerolíneas Argentinas, but the service is very basic. **Andes Líneas Aereas** (✆ **0810/777-26336** or 11/4508-6750; www.andesonline.com) departs Buenos Aires on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and returns the same days (return flights for $335/£184). Both airlines are the only that fly into **Aerodromo El Tehuelche** (✆ **2965/451909**), saving you an hour-long transfer from the other airport, Trelew (see below).

A taxi from the airport to the center of Puerto Madryn, 10km (6¼ miles) away, should cost no more than $8 (£5.40) for the 10-minute ride.

Most visitors to this region fly into Trelew Airport, **Aeropuerto de Trelew** (✆ **2965/433443**), 62km (38 miles) away. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (✆ **0810/222-86527**) has three to four daily flights to Trelew from Buenos Aires and several weekly flights from El Calafate and Ushuaia.

A taxi or *remise* from Trelew airport to Puerto Madryn costs $22 to $30 (£15–£20), and the trip takes 40 minutes.

BY BUS The **Terminal de Omnibus** is on García and Independencia. The fastest bus from Buenos Aires takes 19 hours aboard **Andesmar** (✆ **2965/473764**). The least expensive one-way fare is $75 (£51), but for $12 (£8.20) more, you can travel in a reclining *cama* chair. Andesmar also has daily services to Mendoza ($73/£49 one-way, 23 hr.) and Bariloche ($55/£37 one-way, 13 hr.). Both connect in the city of Neuquén. Other reputable bus companies to try are **QueBus** (✆ **2965/455805**), **Mar y Valle** (✆ **2965/472056**), and **Don Otto** (✆ **2965/451675**).

Visitor Information

You can pick up maps and detailed park information from the **Puerto Madryn Secretaria de Turismo (Tourist Office),** located at Roca 223 (✆ **2965/453504;** www.madryn.gov.ar/turismo). Their office is open daily from 7am to 9pm.

Getting Around

Puerto Madryn is compact enough that you can pretty much walk everywhere. Taxis are available, however, in case you need them. A trip within the city center should cost no more than $5 or $6 (£3.40–£4.05). Taxis are lined up near the Plaza San Martín, or you can call one at ✆ **2965/472214.** A reputable *remise* company is **Remise Madryn,** España 1560 (✆ **2965/453444**).

Buses run by the company **28 de Julio** (✆ **2965/472056**) depart every hour for the 45-minute journey to Trelew. The cost is $4 (£2.70) one-way. **Mar y Valle** (✆ **2965/472056**) buses depart the central bus station once a day to Puerto Pirámides on the Península Valdés at 9:30am and return at 6pm, making it handy for independent day-trippers.

You can rent a car at Trelew Airport, at the Puerto Madryn airport, or from the center of Puerto Madryn. **Avis,** Av. Roca 493 (✆ **2965/475422**), and **Hertz,** Av. Roca 115 (✆ **2965/474287**), have similar rates of about $75 (£51) per day for a small car. If you think you'll want a car, it's best to book it before leaving home, for the lowest rate. If not, try bargaining at **Fiorassi,** Av. Roca 165 (✆ **2965/456300**), a local company that offers lower rates if they have cars available. For exploring the Península Valdés, where virtually none of the roads are paved, consider renting a 4WD. Rates start at $130 (£88) per day.

Fast Facts Puerto Madryn

ATMs There are quite a few ATMs around town. **Banco Galicia,** Mitre 25 (✆ **2965/452323**), and **Bansud,** corner of R. Saenz Pena and Marcos A. Zar (✆ **2965/451489**), are the most conveniently located.

Currency Exchange The Casa de Cambio Thaler, at Roca 493 (✆ **2965/455858**), is open until at least 10pm every night.

Emergency Dial ✆ **101** or 2965/451449 for police; ✆ **100** for fire.

Hospital The **Hospital Subzonal** is at R. Gomez 383 (✆ **2965/453030**).

Internet You'll find many Internet cafes around town. Rates are under $2 (£1.35) per hour, and most are open from 8am until midnight. Try **Cyber World,** at Roca 650 (✆ **2965/475370**), or **El Tucán,** Mosconi 36.

Laundry The laundromat at Roca 2040 (✆ **2965/456969**) is open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 9pm.

Pharmacy **FarMadryn,** corner of Roca and Belgrano (✆ **2965/474555**), is open 24 hours.

Post Office The main post office for **Correo Argentino** (the official name of the Argentine postal service) is located at Belgrano and Maíz (no phone).

WHERE TO STAY

Puerto Madryn hotels are virtually all situated along the main coastal road, Avenida Roca (which turns into Bd. Brown farther south), or a few blocks inland. Besides the avant-garde Hotel Territorio, most are still family-run, old-fashioned hotels that aren't exactly chic. At press time, a local hotel chain, Rayentray, was reopening the giant 180-room multistory white hotel toward the south end of the waterfront. Most visitors to Puerto Madryn spend only 2 or 3 nights here. They visit the peninsula 1 day and Punta Tombo the next, and then fly out. Parking is free at hotels in Puerto Madryn. Prices have soared here over the past few years, especially during the busy months of October and November; some hotels will offer you a cheaper price if you pay in cash. Rates listed here are for high season, September through March.

Expensive

Hotel Península Valdés Overrated For decades, this was the top place in Puerto Madryn, and it retains a certain elusive highbrow feel that would appeal to business travelers. The owners (a well-known local family) have recently tried to be hipper and more modern. Many of the rooms have been renovated, including the bathrooms, which are brighter now, though most tubs are still tiny. Rooms on the top floor are the most spacious. The charge for "panoramic" rooms with sea views is 20% extra, though it never hurts to ask at check-in for a free upgrade. The panoramic rooms have king-size beds and flatscreen TVs. The most annoying thing about this hotel is the charge for use of the sauna ($16/£11) and the unattractive indoor Jacuzzi ($14/£9.45). Internet access from the tiny business center is free, however, and the staff is efficient, if a bit snotty. We recommend the Territorio over this place, if you can afford it. If you are with a tour group or otherwise without a choice but to stay here, however, you will likely find this hotel to be satisfactory, if unimpressive.

Av. Roca 155, 9120 Puerto Madryn. ✆ **2965/471292.** Fax 2965/452584. www.hotelpeninsula.com.ar. 76 units. $225 (£152) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; lounge; Jacuzzi; sauna; small business center w/free Internet; room service; massage; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Hotel Territorio ★ This hotel is small enough to be classified as an inn (36 rooms), but considers itself upscale enough to be a five-star. The hotel itself does not cry for attention, and you may even miss it for how well it blends into the natural setting. It's built in an inconspicuous style with local materials such as stone and tin sheeting. Inside, it seems they are still trying to figure things out. The views are superb: The lobby, restaurant, and bar look out over the water and have towering windows and a sleek, modern look. Rooms are the largest in town, and all face the water to varying degrees. They too feel natural, with washed-cement floors, cream walls, dark-wood furniture, and crisp white linens. Bathrooms are long and narrow, and all have small tubs with ocean views. There is also a spa that's not always open. By far, Territorio is the ambitious, comfortable, and stylish lodging option.

Bd. Brown 3251, 9120 Puerto Madryn. ✆ **2965/470050.** www.atlasdelapatagonia.com.ar. 36 units. From $363 (£245) double; $508 (£343) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; lounge; spa; business center; room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, safe.

Moderate

Hostería Solar de la Costa Finds An oceanfront inn in an upscale neighborhood, the Hostería Solar de la Costa has a breezy feeling. Most of the rooms are doubles with king-size beds, tiny televisions, and clean, compact bathrooms. Rooms that face the ocean cost the same as those facing the garden, so reserve early to get the front ones. Top-floor rooms sleep four and have a fully equipped kitchen and a Jacuzzi. All rooms have air-conditioning. Breakfast includes home-baked breads, pastries, and pies. A big shady garden out back has a barbecue. Overall, this place has a friendly, relaxed feel.

Bd. Brown 2057, 9120 Puerto Madryn. ✆ **2965/458822.** www.solardelacosta.com. 14 units. $135 (£91) double; $229 (£155) quad with kitchen. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Laundry; high-speed Internet; family room; garden. *In room:* TV.

Hotel Bahía Nueva ★★ This is Puerto Madryn's best-kept traditional hotel. The staff is friendly and helpful, and they take great pride in maintaining a spick-and-span hotel. Rooms are pleasant, with wood furnishings and nice tiled bathrooms. Four rooms have sea views; ask at check-in if one is available, and you'll likely be upgraded at no extra cost. Rooms are simple, with tiny televisions in the corner. Most have small windows. The full breakfast buffet may be the best in town, served in a cheerful dining room on

Tips Call Ahead

Although reservations are not required anywhere in Puerto Madryn, you can usually score a better table and a warmer greeting if you call ahead. Even if you don't arrive exactly on time, the mere fact that your name is on a "list" gives you a bit more leeway with the waitstaff. If you see a table you like (by a window, for example) and you have a reservation, they are more likely to give it to you. If you plan to come around 9:30pm, you'll find most places packed. For earlier diners (7:30–8:30pm), you should have less of a problem.

the second floor. The buffet includes fresh fruit and eggs—a rarity in these parts. The ground-level bar area has a pool table and a lovely fireplace in the cozy lounge. The staff is knowledgeable about the area and can help arrange excursions. My main concern is that they have drastically raised their prices without any interior renovations or upgrades to accompany the increase. It is no longer a bargain.

Av. Roca 67, 9120 Puerto Madryn. ✆/fax **2965/451677.** www.bahianueva.com.ar. 40 units. $159 (£107) double; $195 (£132) triple. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; lounge; game room; small business center w/free Internet; laundry service. *In room:* TV.

Inexpensive

Hotel Gran Madryn ★ Young managers with big plans recently took over this aging family-run hotel, and it remains a good deal. The 11 top-floor rooms are largest and all have sea views. The corner units have Jacuzzi tubs. Bathrooms are bright and clean. A half-block from the beach, the location is good. Service is upbeat.

Lugones 40, 9120 Puerto Madryn. ✆ **2965/472205.** www.hotelgranmadryn.com.ar. 43 units. $50 (£34) double; $60 (£41) triple; $85 (£57) superior. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Room service; laundry; high-speed Internet. *In room:* TV.

WHERE TO DINE

Fish is big in Puerto Madryn. The fishermen go out into the bay every morning and reel in white salmon, cod, and sole. Meat is double the price here, compared to Buenos Aires, because everything has to be flown or trucked in. If you are craving meat, the best place is where the locals go—the simple **Estela Parrilla,** R. S. Pena 27 (✆ **2965/451573**). For $12 to $14 (£8.20–£79.45), you can have tenderloin or filet mignon and a salad. A variety of sausages is also available, as well as chicken on the grill. They're open Monday to Saturday from 8pm to midnight and Sunday from noon to 11pm.

Moderate

Cantina El Náutico SEAFOOD A local tradition, this is a great spot for seafood, pasta, and fresh fish. The owners (father and son) are almost always there to make sure the service is smooth, that diners are happy, and that everyone's impressed with the dozens of photos of celebrities who've dined here in the past. Dining a la carte can be pricey; stick with the daily specials when possible. The executive menu is a deal, especially if paella is on offer.

Av. Roca 790. ✆ **2965/471303.** Main courses $14–$20 (£9.45–£14). AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 7pm–midnight.

Mar y Meseta ★★ SEAFOOD/INTERNATIONAL This excellent seafood restaurant manages to be both upscale and relaxed, with a kids' menu. Service is top-notch, and the chef uses Patagonian ingredients whenever possible to create his masterpieces. Start with a bottle of cold Argentine sparkling wine and the chef's appetizer platter, consisting of steamed mussels, smoked mackerel, fried cod fingers, and pickled carrots and cauliflower. Move on to what may very well be the most creative dish in Puerto Madryn: fresh local cod baked with Patagonian honey, served on a bed of toasted cinnamon sticks and sweet-potato chips. Other seafood dishes include a mixed grill of seafood and fish for two people for $21 (£14), and a daily selection of fresh grilled fish filets (depending on the catch of the day). The seafood stew is a hearty meal on a cold evening.

Av. Roca 485. ✆ **2965/458740.** Main courses $14–$22 (£9.45–£15). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 7pm–midnight.

Nativo Sur ★★ (Kids) REGIONAL/INTERNATIONAL This is the best beachfront restaurant in town. A small playground for kids faces the pleasant patio area. The large windows overlooking the bay give the entire place an airy and relaxed feel. The owners, a husband-and-wife team, buy fish daily from a local fisherman, and vegetables are trucked in fresh from a nearby farm. The focus here is fish—whatever is fresh (usually white salmon, sole, or cod), made to order. The best appetizer is a seafood sampler with calamari, scallops, oysters, prawns, and the like. I highly recommend fish of the day with stir-fried vegetables for $8.50 (£5.75). This place is wonderfully laid-back, allowing for a long, leisurely dinner. Service is very friendly and unhurried.

Corner of Brown and Humphreys. ✆ **2965/457403.** Main courses $11–$15 (£7.45–£10). MC, V. Tues–Fri 8pm–midnight; Sat–Sun noon–3:30pm and 8pm–midnight.

Plácido ★ INTERNATIONAL Puerto Madryn's fanciest restaurant has a great location in the center of town. An airy, expansive dining room with plenty of windows, large wineglasses, crisp white tablecloths, and heavy silverware set the stage for an elegant evening. Unfortunately, management has overzealously sought out foreign visitors, which has made the cuisine schizophrenic, at best. Paella, cod in hollandaise sauce, Patagonian lamb with rosemary, and shrimp in curry sauce with white rice are just a few of the many main courses available. The wine list is impressive, and service is very refined. Stick with simply prepared fresh fish or prawns or the good selection of homemade pastas, and you'll have a memorable meal. The vegetarian tagliatelle with wild mushrooms, for example, is delicious. Call ahead and reserve a table by a window overlooking the bay.

Av. Roca 506. ✆ **2965/455991.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $12–$21 (£8.20–£14). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3:30pm and 7:30pm–1am.

Taska Beltza ★ BASQUE/SEAFOOD A local favorite, this spot is hip without being flashy. It's all about good food served in an atmosphere that's not trying to be something it isn't. Chefs garnish local fish and seafood with the classic Basque quartet of seasonings: garlic, lemon, butter, and parsley. Try blackened *merluza* (hake) with red-pepper sauce or *pejerrey* (mackerel). Shrimp with cognac and scallops on the half shell are also excellent. For dessert, don't miss the Beltzan apples. Service can be a bit slow, but it could just be that the staff is that relaxed.

9 de Julio 345. ✆ **2965/474003.** Main courses $8–$12 (£5.40–£8.20). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 7:30pm–midnight.

Inexpensive

Ambigú ★ (Value) PIZZA Elegant but very affordable, Ambigú has a huge menu with a mélange of dishes, ranging from chicken curry to beef chop suey and all kinds of pizzas. The most interesting is the asparagus and provolone pizza with black olives. There's also a limited selection of seafood and fish. It's a fun, boisterous, and informal place that is busy every night. Service can be spotty when they're swamped, but nobody's in a rush here. Order a bottle of Mendoza Malbec to go with your meal, then sit back and watch all the people walk by on the coastal Avenida Roca.

On the corner of Roca and Roque Saenz Pena. ✆ **2965/472541.** Main courses and pizzas $8–$16 (£5.40–£11). MC, V. Daily noon–2pm and 7:30pm–midnight.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

There's not much to see in Puerto Madryn itself, apart from a couple of museums. Most visitors are here because of the town's proximity to the Península Valdés. If you have time

Tips Getting to the Ecocentro

There are four ways to get to the Ecocentro, which is 3km (1¾ miles) south of the center of town. The fastest is by taxi, which will cost around $5 (£2.75). If you have an hour or so, and it's a nice day, walk down the coast to the south, just over the point on the horizon to the museum. Or rent a bike and pedal for about 30 minutes in the same direction. For about 50¢ (35p), you can take the local bus no. 2 from downtown. It will drop you off just down the hill from the Ecocentro. En route, you'll also pass the Punta Cuevas historical monument to the Welsh settlers as well as the Tehuelche Monument to the area's original inhabitants. Remember, Ecocentro is open mainly in the afternoon.

to kill, however, grab a bike or walk up the lovely beach road or stroll the shops along Roca.

Ecocentro ★★ The newest museum in the region is more like an interactive learning center, where you can educate yourself on the marine ecosystems of Atlantic Patagonia. I recommend coming to Ecocentro on your first day in Puerto Madryn, after settling into your hotel and before heading out to the Península Valdés. The view of the ocean is exquisite from this lovely modern building, and the nautical and topographical maps afford deep insight into this region. A tank re-creates a tidal pool, where you can see species that inhabit the coastal areas. A soundtrack plays whale sounds, and a good movie about the Península Valdés explores the habits of Magellan penguins in Punta Tombo, as well as local elephant seals and sea lions. Ask for the English-language handbook to get even more out of your visit. You'll need about 2 hours to visit Ecocentro. A very pleasant on-site cafe serves snacks.

Julio Verne 3784. ✆ **2965/457470.** www.ecocentro.org.ar. Admission $8.50 (£5.75). Year-round daily 5–8pm; summer also 10am–1pm. Hours can fluctuate; call to confirm hours.

PUNTA TOMBO NATIONAL RESERVE

Most visitors spend a day on the Península Valdés and then a day at Punta Tombo National Reserve, the second-most-visited attraction in Atlantic Patagonia. The largest sanctuary for Magellan penguins, Punta Tombo is 248km (154 miles) south of Puerto Madryn, a 2-hour trip. Every year from September to April (the park is closed May–Aug), up to a million of these penguins return to Punta Tombo to mate. Visitors are able to walk just a few feet away from thousands of penguins guarding their nests. Baby penguins are visible in December and January. Bird lovers will enjoy views of king and rock cormorants, giant petrels, kelp gulls, and oystercatchers as well.

The drive from Puerto Madryn is all highway, until you pass Trelew; then you head south on RP 1, a monotonous gravel road that seems to go on forever. The entrance to the national reserve is clearly marked, and the entrance fee is $17 (£12). Be sure to observe all the posted signs (stopping your car is strictly prohibited except in the designated parking lots). Walkways and handrails point you in the right direction as you explore. Veering off the trail is prohibited, as is going down to the beach. There is a cafeteria at Punta Tombo, but consider bringing a picnic instead. You'll need about 2 hours to visit the reserve and observe the penguins. Tour operators run trips daily for about $75 (£51), and some stop for tea in Gaiman (see later in this chapter).

TOUR OPERATORS

Puerto Madryn's coastal street, Avenida Roca, is lined with travel agencies. Shop around for a space if you are booking at the last minute. Unless you are bilingual, it's very important to ensure that your tour has an English-speaking guide. Almost all quote the same price for standard tours, such as the 1-day Península Valdés or Punta Tomba tours, most of which start at 7:30am (depending on whether you are staying in Trelew or Puerto Madryn) and get you back before dinner. One-day tours of the Península Valdés start at $60 (£41) per person, not including the whale-watching trip (an additional $35/£24) or lunch.

If you have a group of six or more, it is worthwhile—and surely more relaxing—to take a private tour for the same price, rather than signing up for a standard group tour.

Flamenco Tour, Av. Roca 331 (✆ **2965/455505;** www.flamencotour.com), is perhaps the largest tour operator in the area. The 1-day guided tour to the Península Valdés lasts from 7:30am to 7pm and includes a stop at the museum, a chance to go on a whale-watching cruise, and guided walks on the Punta Delgada beach and Caleta Valdés, to view the elephant seals.

Huinca Travel, Av. Roca 353 (✆ **2965/454411;** www.huincatravel.com), has traditional tours in small groups as well as active options, including a nighttime whale-watching tour and mountain biking on the Península Valdés. **NieveMar Tours** ★, Av. Roca 493 (✆ **2965/455544;** www.nievemartours.com.ar), has very friendly and knowledgeable guides. They offer the standard Península Valdés tour with a long lunch break, to stretch your legs, at Caleta Valdés; a full day at Punta Tombo; and a 6-hour trip to discover the Welsh heritage of Gaiman. They can also set up multiday tours that include accommodations.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

BIKING **Huellas y Costas,** Bd. Brown 860 (✆ **2965/15-680515** [cell]; www.huellasycostas.com), has guided mountain-biking tours that last from a few hours to 3 days. For short-term bike rentals, try **El Retorno,** Mitre 798 (✆ **2965/456044**). A 1-day bike rental will cost around $10 (£6.80).

DIVING Most of the diving companies here offer the same tours for the same price. It's a question of whose schedules you like. All have been licensed and have high safety standards. The main draw is swimming with the sea lions and elephant seals, and some also arrange for diving close to the whales. **Aquatours,** Av. Roca 550 (✆ **2965/451954**), offers a variety of diving trips in the bay off Puerto Madryn and also off the Península Valdés.

FISHING Call **Raúl Díaz** (✆ **2965/450812**), a seasoned fisherman who will be happy to take visitors out with him on a fishing trip.

GOLF The **Puerto Madryn Golf Club** (http://golf.madryn.com) is on RN 4, on the road to the airport. Call the club manager, Juan González (✆ **2965/471947**), to arrange your tee times and get detailed information on the rates.

HORSEBACK RIDING For rides between 2 and 4 hours in the steppe above Madryn and along the coast, try **Nativo Adventure** (✆ **2965/15-695232** [cell]), or **Huellas y Costas** (see below).

KAYAKING **Huellas y Costas,** Bd. Brown 1900 (✆ **2965/15-637826** [cell]; www.huellasycostas.com), runs regular sea-kayaking outings from late December through March.

WINDSURFING You can rent a sailboard and sail from the **Vernardino Club Mar,** Bd. Brown 860 (✆ **2965/474289**).

PUERTO MADRYN AFTER DARK

This town is very subdued at night. Because most visitors rise at the crack of dawn to head to the Península Valdés, Puerto Madryn shuts down early. The best place for a late-night drink (and light snacks such as pizza and hamburgers for $5–$9/£3.40–£6.10, served until 1am) is **Margarita Pub,** R.S. Peña 15 (✆ **2965/450454;** daily 5pm–3am; no credit cards), an attractive wood-and-tile lounge with a large bar. All the locals who work as guides during the day come here on weekends—this place is hopping from midnight to 3am on Friday and Saturday.

2 PENINSULA VALDES

Most visitors to the peninsula come for the day on guided excursions, aboard small nine-passenger vans. There is enough here, however, to keep you busy for 3 or 4 days. If you choose to drive on your own in a rental car, remember that the peninsula is very isolated and barren, and the only gas station is in Puerto Pirámides. Sometimes you can go for hours without seeing another soul. All roads on the peninsula are gravel, and driving is hazardous. Consider renting a 4WD truck for more comfort.

Península Valdés is not a national park but a Natural Protected Area managed by the Province of Chubut. Within its protected borders, families continue to run the ranches that they have managed for more than a century, although some are now turning to tourism. Human activity is restricted, and although tourism is now the major player, the balance game between conservation and recreation is monitored closely.

At the park gates, foreign visitors have to stop and pay an entrance fee of $21 (£14) per person (it's good for the length of your stay in the park, be that an afternoon or 3 days). Just past the entrance to the national park (which is about a half-hour's drive northeast of Puerto Madryn), the new **Interpretive Center** makes a good consolation prize if you don't have time for the excellent Ecocentro museum in Puerto Madryn (see above). The Interpretive Center is open from 8am to 8pm daily. Admission is free. From the park entrance, after driving east for about an hour on Ruta 2, you'll reach the tiny village of Puerto Pirámides (pop. 202), which is only 2 blocks wide. This is the main launching spot for the whale-watching boats that depart from this area from April to late December. Whale-watching trips cost $35 (£24) per person and last about 1 ½ hours.

The rest of the year, warmer weather transforms Puerto Pirámides (see below) into more of a beach town, popular with vacationing Argentines on their summer holidays. The Southern Right Whales that swim past here once verged on extinction (they earned their name because they move slowly and float easily, making them "right" for hunters). Today, these gentle giants gather to mate in these bays just off the peninsula from April to December. They each weigh 35 to 40 tons and measure about 17m long (56 ft.). About 800 whales show up each year, after feeding in Antarctica for 3 months. Whale-watching trips almost always bring visitors within meters of these very social whales. It's a rare and moving experience.

From Puerto Pirámides, if you continue east on Ruta Provincial 2, you'll reach **Punta Delgada,** a stretch of beach favored by elephant seals from mid-June to late December. You can stop for lunch at the upscale Faro Punta Delgada hotel (see below) and also take a tour of the lighthouse.

Tips When to Visit

Timing is critical when you're visiting the Península Valdés. If you want to see penguins, forget about coming here between May and August. If you're hoping to watch whales, don't come between mid-December and April. All things considered, the ideal time to visit Atlantic Patagonia is in October or November. The penguins have laid their eggs and are guarding their nests, the whales are happily swimming in the bays with their offspring, and schools in Argentina are still in session, so crowds are thin.

Heading north on RP 47 will bring you to **Caleta Valdés,** which has a cafeteria on the bluff overlooking the ocean. This is where most visitors on excursions eat lunch, so it is very busy from 1 to 3pm. The stairs leading down to the beach take you to another stretch of sand covered by elephant seals, which are usually sleeping. Pleasant interpretive walks with placards explain the natural history of the area, with beautiful views of the Atlantic Coast.

At the northeastern tip of the peninsula is Punta Norte, where hundreds of sea lions congregate from January to June. Orcas can sometimes be seen off this point too, attracted by the sea lions—their favorite snack. Count yourself very lucky if you manage to see the orcas hunting baby sea lions during dramatic high-tide attacks. Just to the west of Punta Norte is **Estancia San Lorenzo** (✆ **2965/458444**), which welcomes a colony of up to 200,000 Magellan penguins each year from August to April. Tours are expensive ($45/£30 per person) but worthwhile, because you get to see penguins up close, in a very quiet setting. Come early in the morning if possible.

Because the peninsula is barren and dry, you'll be able to spot guanacos; reminiscent of small llamas, they're found only in Patagonia. Because they are so shy, however, they usually run in the opposite direction when they see a car coming. Also keep an eye out for *choiques* (ostrichlike birds); the strange-looking *mara,* which is a rabbit that runs on four-legs like a dog; and lots of sheep In the middle of the peninsula, three giant salt flats appear like mirages on the horizon.

In 1 day, it's possible to quickly sample the area and spot some whales, sea lions, elephant seals, and guanacos. You will spend the bulk of the day in the tour operator's van, however, especially if you are staying in Trelew. Wildlife lovers should plan to spend 2 or 3 days exploring the peninsula. For more information and good interactive online maps, visit **www.peninsulavaldes.org.ar**.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

The peninsula has a handful of new upscale lodging options—namely ranches or lighthouses that have opened their doors to the public over the past 5 years or so. Most are expensive and offer packages that include all meals and daily activities. They're a relaxing way to really live the wonders of Península Valdés, to see the wildlife in silence, and to get away from it all. I recommend you spend at least 2 nights in any of the following places. Highly recommended, **Estancia La Elvira** (✆ **2965/474248;** www.laelvira.com.ar) is inland, at the working heart of a ranch, which also runs a restaurant overlooking Caleta Valdés. The ranch house has eight large rooms that start at $280 (£189) with breakfast or $330 (£223) for full board. You don't get the coastal views or the ocean breezes here, but you will delight in excellent service and a charming rural facility. At the

tiny and elegant **Rincón Chico** ★★ (✆ **2965/471733;** www.rinconchico.com.ar; all-inclusive doubles at $395/£266 per night), a local family has opened the doors to their eight-room guesthouse near the beach, with great success. The most visitor-friendly is the **Faro P unta D elgada** ★★ (✆ **2965/458444;** www .puntadelgada.com; all-inclusiv e doubles at $340/£229 per night), inside a r efurbished go vernment lighthouse facility . The setting is beautifully wind-swept, and the rugged outdoor setting is balanced by the charming staff and nice amenities inside the hotel. R ooms are cozy and countr y-style, with blue-gingham bedspreads and simple bathrooms. Guests can explore the lighthouse, which brings a sense of romance to dark evenings, or the many nearby trails that lead to deserted beaches on their o wn. The bar is a gr eat place to gather and shar e stories with other travelers in the evening. The restaurant is packed with tourists during the day, but it's much mor e intimate for br eakfast and dinner. All thr ee of the abo ve are heads-and-tails above the hotels in Puerto Madryn in terms of warmth, service, natural setting, and ambience.

3 PUERTO PIRAMIDES

100km (62 miles) NE of P uerto Madryn

The only village inside the P enínsula Valdés National Park, Puerto Pirámides is tiny—about 4 blocks. Once a bustling salt-exporting port, today it's a quiet village. It's the sole launching point for the many whale-watching trips that depar t from here, from April to late December. During the day, the beach is mobbed with day-trippers, but it 's a much more intimate experience in the ev ening. Some travelers choose to stay her e overnight instead of in Puerto Madryn (see earlier in this chapter), especially if they have their own transportation. You can venture to other parts of the park much more quickly from here. There is no fresh water here—salt water is just barely treated before hitting your taps—so you must make an effor t to conserve water and drink only bottled water.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

See "Getting There," under "Puerto Madryn," earlier in this chapter.

BY CAR You can rent a car in P uerto Madryn or in Trelew. From Puerto Madryn, the trip is 100km (62 miles) and takes about 1 1/2 hours. There's only one road here: Ruta 2.

BY BUS Daily buses depar t Puerto Madryn's terminal at 9:30am and r eturn at 6pm. Contact **Mar y Valle** (✆ **2965/472065**). The cost is $5.50 (£3.70) each way.

A taxi or *remise* fr om P uerto M adryn should cost no mor e than $100 (£68); fr om Trelew, the cost is $150 (£101).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

See also "Península Valdés," above.

Since Puerto Pirámides is the only town on the peninsula, it's entirely tourist-oriented and, ther efore, v ery expensiv e. The only gas station on the peninsula is her e. Whale-watching tours depart from here, so it is a stopover point for people who are visiting the park. D iving trips also leav e fr om her e, and the fe w hotels ar e fr equently filled with groups of divers from Europe. From late December to late March, when the whales leave the bay, it's possible to kayak and swim, and the area becomes a destination for beach-seeking

Argentine vacationers. But the main draw is the whale-watching trips. The cost is about $35 (£24) per person, but if you're staying overnight, I encourage you to bargain with Captain Pinino (see below) to arrange your own excursion. Staying here also gives you best access to the sunset whale-watching trips, which are beautiful. Sometimes you can even hear the whales at night from your room. A few nights here will leave you relaxed and in touch with nature.

Captain Pinino at **Whales Argentina** ★★ (✆ **2965/495015;** www.whalesargentina.com.ar) has the newest boat around, and he is fun and very experienced. There's usually a group whale-watching trip at around 10:30am daily, but he can arrange private trips later in the day as well.

For kayaking (in the summer), try either **Hydrosport** (✆ **2965/495065**) or **Moby Dick** (✆ **2965/495122**). Even if you've never dived before, **Patagonia Scuba** (✆ **2965/495030**) will take you out for a first dive, and will take more seasoned divers for night and deep dives.

WHERE TO STAY

Choices are limited in Puerto Pirámides, and prices are very high. There are a handful of private campgrounds in town, but you'll need a tent. Camping is prohibited elsewhere in the peninsula. For other alternatives, see "Where to Stay & Dine" in the Península Valdés section, above. Rates listed here are for high season, September through March.

Las Restingas The best and most expensive hotel in the region has 12 rooms, 8 of which are oceanfront with fantastic views. If you're lucky, you might even spot a whale from your private patio. The airy lobby and adjacent dining room, with its exposed stone, are pleasant, with an understated elegance. Rooms have tiled floors, wooden beds, wrought-iron lamps, ceiling fans, and sliding French doors that overlook the ocean or the village. Rooms have TVs, but no cable; instead you can borrow movies on DVD. I highly recommend splurging for the sea view; the other rooms are darker and less cheery. Marble bathrooms have bathtubs.

1st right as you enter the village, Puerto Pirámides. ✆ **2965/495101.** www.lasrestingas.com. 12 units. $182–$308 (£123–£208) double with sea view; $150–$236 (£101–£159) double with village view. Rates include breakfast and either lunch or dinner. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; tour desk; room service; laundry service; DVD library. *In room:* TV/DVD player, minibar, hair dryer.

The Paradise Hostería ★ A large brick building midway up the hill, the Paradise is friendly and fun. Most of the rooms are basic, with clean and simple white bathrooms, bright bedspreads, ceramic floors, and overhead fans. It is surrounded by a lush green garden. Their two suites are not cheap, but they are probably the best rooms in town, with lovely sea views and large Jacuzzis, which is somewhat gluttonous in a town that has hardly any water access. Staff members are relaxed and helpful and treat guests like family. The restaurant, full of seafaring knickknacks, is popular with locals and has a large menu. Most evenings, it's the liveliest place in town.

2nd right as you enter the village. ✆ **2965/495030.** www.hosteriaparadise.com.ar. 12 units. $218 (£147) double; $327 (£221) suite with Jacuzzi and sea view. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; laundry service; patio.

WHERE TO DINE

Las Restingas (see above) has the best restaurant in the village.

El Refugio ★ SEAFOOD The owner of this quirky restaurant-bar is a fisherman, so you can be assured that what you're eating is fresh from local waters. Ask what he found

that day, and order it. The small dining room, filled with antiques, has a very cozy feel to it. Just behind the restaurant are two snug cabins for rent, at $65 (£44) for a double; they each have a tiny kitchenette, a small but clean bathroom, and a double bed.

Puerto Pirámides. ✆ **2965/495031.** Main courses $9–$16 (£6.10–£11). No credit cards. Daily noon–11pm.

La Estación ★ ARGENTINE This place is a great choice for lunch on a warm day, with a very pleasant patio outside a building with a historical feel. Fresh seafood is the focus, but they also have homemade pastas, salads, and some grilled meats. Note that the restaurant is closed the last week in December.

Puerto Pirámides. ✆ **2965/495047.** Main courses $9–$20 (£6.10–£14). No credit cards. Daily 10am–11pm.

4 TRELEW

67km (42 miles) S of Puerto Madryn

Trelew's airport is the gateway to the region; many travelers pass through here on their way to and from the Península Valdés. The largest city in the region (pop. 100,000), Trelew is industrial and certainly not as charming at its neighbor Puerto Madryn. The town has a pleasant square and an excellent paleontological museum, but little else of interest. The nearby Welsh town, Gaiman, is worth an afternoon visit.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

Aerolíneas Argentinas (✆ **0810/222-86527**) is the sole operator at **Almirante Zar** airport, 5km (3 miles) from the city center. They fly at least twice daily from Buenos Aires, with extra flights on weekends. Aerolíneas also has several weekly flights from El Calafate and Ushuaia. **28 de Julio** buses (✆ **2965/472056**) arrive every hour from Puerto Madryn at the OmniBus station, located at 100 Urquiza (✆ **2965/420121**). The cost is $7 (£4.75) one-way. Buses from Buenos Aires take 20 hours and cost $75 (£51) one-way.

VISITOR INFORMATION The tourist office is on the Plaza San Martín, at 387 Mitre (✆ **2965/420139;** www.trelew.gov.ar). The English-speaking agents are very helpful and have lots of maps and information about the Península Valdés and the region. The office is open from 8am to 8pm daily.

Getting Around

A taxi or *remise* from the airport to the city center will cost no more than $5 (£3.40). From Puerto Madryn to Trelew, a taxi or *remise* will cost no more than $35 (£24). A taxi from Puerto Pirámides is $155 (£105).

Fiorasi Rent-A-Car has offices at the airport and at Urquiza 31 (✆ **2965/435344**) in the city center. **Hertz** has an office only at the airport (✆ **2965/436005**). The average cost for a compact car is $70 (£47) per day.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

There's not much to see here except for one museum, but if you have a bit of extra time, you may want to take a walk around the pleasant San Martín square.

Museo Paleontológico Egidio Feruglio (Paleontological Museum Egidio Feruglio) ★★ The MEF, as it is widely known, is one of the best paleontological museums in South America, a must for dinosaur fans. Opened in 2000, it houses an amazing collection of fossils and dinosaur bones. Inside the museum (and visible when you visit) is a working lab where a team of scientists studies and cleans fossils.Try to come here during the week when the scientists are at work (Mon–Fri), and you'll get a sense of how much they do to study just one fossil. An amazing skeleton of a titonausaur, which walked on this land 70 million years ago, fills one room. Other rooms take you through a chronological order of dinosaur discoveries over the years, from past to present. There's also a good movie with English subtitles showing sea fossils found in Patagonia. You'll need about 1 1/2 hours to visit the museum. The lobby houses a gift shop and a snack bar.

Av. Fontana 140. ✆ **2965/420012.** www.mef.org.ar. Admission $8 (£5.40). Daily 10am–6pm.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

The most centrally located hotel is **Hotel Rayentray,** San Martín 101 (✆ **2965/434702;** www.cadenarayentray.com.ar), just steps from the main plaza. The building is modern on the outside and dated on the inside. It has 110 rooms that are comfortable but neither luxurious nor elegant, and some complain it is too noisy. There's a small indoor pool, massages available, a restaurant, and a bar. American Express, MasterCard, and Visa are accepted. The cost is $88 to $120 (£59–£81) for a double.

The best *parrilla* in town is **El Viejo Molino,** Av. Gales 250 (✆ **2965/428019**). In a heritage building, the wood-fired grill offers up classics of sausages, beef, chicken, and lamb. They also serve grilled vegetables and interesting pastas. Main courses cost $8 to $15 (£5.40–£10). No credit cards are accepted. They are open from noon to 3pm and from 8 to 11:30pm Tuesday through Sunday.

5 GAIMAN

17km (10 miles) W of Trelew

Just a 10-minute drive west of Trelew, you'll find the lush, green town of Gaiman, settled in 1870 by immigrants from Wales. It's a pleasant place to take a walk and to admire the very English-looking houses. Almost every house in this town of 4,500 residents is open to the public in some way, as a teahouse, a small inn, or some other type of hospitality center. People in Gaiman—many of them descendants of the original families such as the Joneses and Roberts—are both exceedingly friendly and proud. They cling to their unique heritage with the same sense of purpose that brought their ancestors all the way here more than 130 years ago. Gaiman is also known for its singing choirs that blend traditional Welsh tunes with Argentine folk music. Each October, the town hosts the Eisteddfod music and poetry festival, which draws people from Wales and other Welsh communities around the world. Some of the choirs perform at the teahouses (see below).

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

From Trelew, buses such as 28 de Julio (✆ **2965/472056**) depart regularly for Gaiman from Plaza Roca. Fewer buses run on the weekends. The trip is about 25 minutes and

costs about $3 (£2). A *remise* from Trelew to Gaiman should cost around $12 (£8.20). If you are driving, take Ruta 25 west from Trelew.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

The Welsh museum, **Museo Histórico Regional Gales,** at the corner of Rivadavia and Sarmiento streets (no phone), is an interesting place to get the lowdown on the town and its origins. The Welsh immigrants built the Chubut railway, and the museum is housed in the old railway station. It contains some interesting documents and relics from the late 1800s and early 1900s. Admission is $1 (70p).

If you are keen on continuing to explore the Welsh scene, take a side trip to the nearby village of **Dolavan,** 18km (11 miles) west of Gaiman via RN 25. It's an authentic little farming village, with wooden water wheels and a historic town center with old brick buildings, including the old mill known here as the **Molino Harinero,** Maipú 61 (✆ **2965/492290**). Built in 1880, it still operates, has a small cafe serving hearty sandwiches, and opens sporadically for guided tours. The little brick chapel, built in 1917, is typical of the Welsh architecture that blends so naturally with the environment. It's one of a handful of similar constructions that dot the countryside of the Chubut River valley.

WHERE TO STAY

Many of the small teahouses (see above) have a room or two available for rent. They are generally spanking clean. Try the friendly **Hostería Gwesty Tywi,** Jones 342 (✆ **2965/491292;** from $45/£30 double). The most charming place to stay near Gaiman is the rural **Posada los Mimbres,** Chacra 211, Gaiman (✆ **2965/491299;** www.posadalosmimbres.com.ar), which is housed on a sprawling farm 6km (4 miles) from town. There is an old house, built more than 100 years ago, and a new one that is much brighter; both have three doubles that cost $228 (£154) with breakfast included.

High Tea in Gaiman

Most visitors come to Gaiman to have real Welsh tea, a tradition that was built on the difficult life of the early settlers, who came home in the afternoons and found solace in a cup of warm brew sent specially to these outposts from the United Kingdom. The tradition lives on, and it's now shared with the public: The late Princess Diana herself enjoyed tea here in 1995, when she made an official visit. The chair she sat on is displayed inside a lovely house that has become one of the best teahouses in Gaiman: **Ty Te Caerdydd,** Finca 202 (✆ **2965/491510**), serves Welsh tea complete with sandwiches, scones, homemade jams, cakes, and lemon pie every day from 2 to 8pm. The cost is $8 (£5.40) per person. **Ty Nain,** Yrigoyen 283 (✆ **2965/491126**), will fill you up with *torta galesa* (Welsh cake) and a bottomless pot of tea, also for $8 (£5.40). The lovely 1890 home is sparkling clean and has a small museum of Welsh-Argentine history out back. Note that the Gaiman tea experience is popular with bus tours; if you are on your own, look for a spot that doesn't have a bus parked out front if you want some personal attention.

6 EL CALAFATE ★★

222km (138 miles) S of El Chaltén; 2,727km (1,691 miles) SW of Buenos Aires

El Calafate was once a rough frontier town that served as the center for a vast community of remote *estancias* (ranches). Today, it is primarily a tourist-oriented town that has seen phenomenal growth in the past 5 years. It's best known for being the base from which to see the spectacular Perito Moreno Glacier. The town hugs the shore of turquoise Lago Argentino, and this location, combined with the town's leafy streets, gives it the feel of an oasis in the desert steppe. The town's population has grown from 5,000 in 1996 to 30,000 in 2008, and has a remarkable 5,000 hotel beds—there are a lot of hotels here! Besides the natural wonders in the Los Glaciares National Park, the town depends heavily on the many daily flights that arrive at the El Calafate International Airport packed with foreign and national tourists. Thousands of visitors come for the chance to stand face to face with tremendous walls of ice, including one of the few glaciers in the ice field that isn't retreating (scientists say the Perito Moreno Glacier is "in balance," meaning it shrinks and grows constantly).

The town was named for the *calafate* bush found throughout Patagonia, which produces a sweet berry commonly used in syrups, ice creams, and jams. As the economy in Buenos Aires deteriorated, following the country's financial collapse in 2001, many Argentines fled to the countryside as well as here, to El Calafate, which had suffered from a tourist-trap mentality for years. While urban planning is nonexistent, the town is quite pleasant, tidy, and clean, and there are more and more efficient and creative businesses meant to serve visitors. But you won't find many attractions here—they are almost all within the confines of Los Glaciares National Park. What you will find, however, are several good restaurants and a charming main street lined with boutiques boasting fine leather goods and shops selling locally manufactured chocolates, jams, and delicious caramel cookies called *alfajores*.

Most of the time you spend in the town will be on your arrival and departure days as you transfer in or out of the airport.

Fast Facts El Calafate

ATMs There are only a few ATMs around town. **Banco de la Nación,** Av. del Libertador 1133 (✆ **02902/429536**), and **Banco Provincia de Santa Cruz,** Av. del Libertador 1285 (✆ **02902/492320**), are the most conveniently located. ***Note:*** At press time, there was no ATM in El Chaltén. If you're headed there, be sure to withdraw extra cash in El Calafate.

Currency Exchange The Casa de Cambio Thaler is at Av. del Libertador 1242 (✆ **02902/493245**).

Emergency Dial ✆ **101** or 02902/451449 for police; ✆ **100** for fire.

Hospital The **Hospital Distrital José Formenti** is at Av. Julio A. Roca 1487 (✆ **02902/491001**).

Internet You'll find many Internet cafes around town. All have fast connections, for about $1 (70p) per hour. Try **El Calafate Cyber,** 25 de Mayo 23 (✆ **02902/492706**), or the **Cooperativa Telefónica,** Cte. Espora 194 (✆ **02902/491011**), which has the fastest connections, at about $1.50 (£1) per half-hour. They are open Monday to Saturday from 8am to midnight, and Sunday from 9am to midnight.

Laundry **El Lavadero** is at 25 de Mayo 43 (✆ **2965/492182**), and **Lava Andino** is at Cte. Espora 88 (✆ **2965/493980**).

Pharmacy **Farmacia Del Cerro** is at Av. del Libertador 1337 (✆ **02902/491496**).

Post Office The main post office for **Correo Argentino** (the official name of the Argentine postal service) is located at Av. del Libertador 1133 (✆ **02902/491012**).

Taxi There are a number of taxi or *remise* agencies in El Calafate. A good one is **Lago Argentino,** which has an office at the corner of Avenida del Libertador and 15 de Febrero (✆ **2902/491479**).

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

BY PLANE El Calafate's **Aeropuerto Lago Argentino** (✆ **02902/491220**) is a modern complex that was built in 2000. It's already proving to be too small, though, for the increasing traffic. Service is from Argentine destinations only: **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (✆ **11/4340-3777** in Buenos Aires; www.aerolineas.com.ar) has daily flights from Buenos Aires and flights from Bariloche, Trelew, and Ushuaia several times a week. A daily 747 flight also arrives directly from Ezeiza International Airport in Buenos Aires during high season (all flights used to leave from Aeroparque, downtown, and you would have to change airports). Be sure to specify which airport you'd like to fly from. **LAN** (✆ **0810/999-9526;** www.lan.com) has three flights per week from Buenos Aires, and it's planning to offer more in the future. **LADE** (**Líneas Areas del Estado;** ✆ **0810/810-5233;** www.lade.com.ar) has a weekly flight from Buenos Aires and weekly connection to Puerto Madryn, Ushuaia, and Bariloche. Their flights have no onboard service, and are generally much cheaper than the other airlines.

The airport is 23km (14 miles) from the center of town, which seems like a long way in the wide-openness of Patagonia. From the airport, **Aerobús** (✆ **02902/492492**) operates a bus to all the hotels in town for $4 (£2.70); they can also pick you up for your return trip if you call 24 hours ahead. A taxi into town should cost no more than $9 (£6.10) for up to four people. There's also a handful of rental car desks at the airport. Please note that on the exit from this airport, all travelers are required to pay an airport exit tax of $18 (£12).

BY BUS El Calafate has a bus terminal on Julio A. Roca, reached via the stairs up from the main street, Avenida del Libertador. To and from Puerto Natales, Chile: **Turismo Zaahj** (✆ **02902/491631;** www.turismozaahj.co.cl) has six weekly trips leaving El Calafate at 8am, returning from Puerto Natales at 8am. **Cootra** (✆ **02902/491144**) leaves El Calafate at 8:30am, returning at 7:30am. The trip takes 5 to 6 hours, depending on how long it takes to get through border-crossing procedures. To get to El Chaltén, your

options are **Chaltén Travel** (✆ **02902/491833**), which departs El Calafate daily at 8am, 1pm (in high season), and 6:30pm; or **Caltur** (✆ **02902/491842**), which has buses leaving El Calafate at 7:30am and 6:30pm. The trip takes approximately 3 hours, but travel time should diminish if the pavement project on the Ruta 40 north of El Calafate is finally finished. To Rio Gallegos, the capital of the Provence of Santa Cruz, buses depart El Calafate daily at 12:30pm, returning at 8pm with **Sportsman** (✆ **02902/492680**) and departing El Calafate at noon and 2:30pm with **Taqsa** (✆ **02902/491843**), returning at noon and 2pm. Buy all bus tickets the day before, at least, to ensure you'll get a seat.

BY CAR Ruta 5, followed by Ruta 11, is paved entirely from Río Gallegos to El Calafate. From Puerto Natales, in summer time you can cross through the border at Cerro Castillo, which will lead you to the famous Ruta 40 and up to the paved portion of Ruta 11. Buses take and commercial vehicles go via Rio Turbio. The drive from Puerto Natales is roughly 5 hours, not including time spent at the border checkpoint.

Getting Around

For information about transportation to and from Perito Moreno Glacier, see "Parque Nacional Los Glaciares & Perito Moreno Glacier," later in this chapter. If you'd like to rent a car, you can do so at the locally owned **Servi-Car,** Av. del Libertador 1341 (✆ **02902/492634;** www.servicar4x4.com.ar). Rates begin at $70 (£47) per day, including insurance and taxes. To hook El Calafate with other Patagonian destinations, such as Puerto Madryn, via rental car, try **Fiorasi Rentacar,** Av. del Libertador 1341 (✆ **02902/495330**). Rental cars may be of interest if you're in a group of four people and want to cover longer distances of 4 hours or more, including the drive to El Chaltén or Torres del Paine National Park in Chile. Many roads here are unpaved. Most of the town can be explored on foot, although many new hotels are either up a good-size hill or well out of town, so make sure your hotel offers a shuttle. Taxis in El Calafate are reasonably priced. More and more people are also visiting El Chaltén in a rental car, thanks to the road improvements. Buses are frequent, though, so it's not really necessary.

Visitor Information

The city's **visitor information kiosk** is inside the bus terminal. They offer an ample amount of printed material and can assist in planning a trip to Perito Moreno Glacier; they're open October through April from 8am to 11pm daily and May through September from 8am to 8pm daily (✆ **02902/491090**). All other spots that look like information centers are travel agencies trying to sell tours.

Two good websites for impartial information are **www.elcalafate.com.ar** and the municipal government's site at **www.elcalafate.gov.ar**.

WHAT TO SEE & DO IN EL CALAFATE

El Calafate serves mostly as a service town for visitors on their way to the glaciers (see "Parque Nacional Los Glaciares & Perito Moreno Glacier," later in this chapter), but it does present a pleasant main avenue for a stroll. As expected, there are lots of souvenirs, bookstores, and crafts shops to keep you occupied. Heading out of town on Avenida del Libertador, you'll pass the **Calafate Historical Interpretation Center** (Calle G. Bonarelli s/n; ✆ **02902/492799;** free admission), open Monday through Friday from 10am to 9pm, with a collection of farming and ranching implements, Indian artifacts, and historical and ethnographical displays. It's worth a stop if you have the time. The **Los Glaciares National Park Headquarters,** Av. del Libertador 1302 (✆ **02902/491755**),

PACIFIC OCEAN
Cochrane
Villa O'Higgins
Lago O'Higgins
Parque Nacional
Puerto Edén
ISLA WELLINGTON
Lago San Martín
Lago Cardiel
Mt. Fitz Roy
El Chaltén
Gobernador Gregores
Bernardo O'Higgins
Parque Nacional Los Glaciares
Lago Viedma
Lago Argentino
Glaciar Perito Moreno
El Calafate
Santa Cruz
Puerto Santa Cruz
CHILE
ARGENTINA
Parque Nacional Torres del Paine
Cueva del Milodón
Bahía Grande
Reserva Nacional Alacalufes
Puerto Natales
Río Gallegos
9
Punta Delgada
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Penguin colony
Reserva Nacional Magallanes
Isla Magdalena
Seno Otway
Punta Arenas
Porvenir
Reserva Nacional Laguna Parrillar
Fuerte Bulnes
Camerón
GRANDES VENTISQUEROS
ISLA GRANDE DE TIERRA DEL FUEGO
Río Grande
Parque Nacional Alberto de Agostini
Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego
Ushuaia
Puerto Williams
Mar Chileno
Parque Nacional Cabo de Hornos
Cabo de Hornes
Airport
Mountain
0 50 mi
0 50 km
CHILE
ARGENTINA
San Carlos de Bariloche
Buenos Aires
Peninsula Valdes
Map Area
Chico

El Calafate with a Half-Day to Kill

Because of flight and bus schedules, many people are "stuck" in El Calafate the day they arrive or depart.

Here's our list of the best things to do to make use of this extra time:

- Who knew there were flamingos in Patagonia? Take your binoculars and stroll along the shallow shore of Laguna Nimez, on the edge of town. Other birds include cauquén geese, black-necked swans, and ibis birds. Join a guided tour with **Ecowalks** (✆ **02902/493196**).
- Slated to open in 2009, the new **Glaciarium** (www.glaciarium.com) is a state-of-the-art glaciology facility calling itself a "Museum of Patagonian Ice." Inspired by the Ecocentro museum at Puerto Madryn, it's sure to be a worthwhile museum-style interpretive center.
- **Calafate Historical Interpretation Center** (see above) is a exhibition center that covers 14,000 years of history. Five blocks from downtown, it's open daily until 10pm.
- Let your inner gaucho ride free on a half-day **horseback** riding trip. See below for details on outfitters.
- The *estancia* **El Galpón del Glaciar** (see below) has afternoon sheep-shearing shows, and evening folklore dinner shows. Similar programs are offered at **Parque de la Bahía** (see below).

has a good visitor information center and a lovely garden. New to town is the planned **Glaciarium: Museum of Patagonian Ice** (www.glaciarium.com), which is scheduled to open in late 2009. Located 3km (2 miles) from town, it will focus on interpretation of the ancient ices of Los Glaciares National Park, with a 3-D theater, interactive exhibits, and a thorough catalog of the planet's glaciers. The plans looks very impressive.

ATTRACTIONS & EXCURSIONS AROUND EL CALAFATE

For information about visiting the glaciers and the national park, see "Parque Nacional Los Glaciares & Perito Moreno Glacier," later in this chapter. Other typical excursions from El Calafate include El Chaltén, for trekking beneath the famous peaks of Cerro Torre and Mt. FitzRoy in 1 day, or a jampacked day visiting Chile's Torres del Paine National Park. For either of these, try **Patagonia Extrema,** Av. del Libertador 1341 (✆ **02902/492393;** www.southroad.com.ar), or **Los Glaciares Turismo,** Brown 1188 (✆ **02902/498320**). More and more adventure activities and excursions are popping up in El Calafate, capitalizing on the tourism boom.

FISHING **Calafate Fishing,** Av. del Libertador 1826 (✆ **02902/496545;** www.calafatefishing.com), has half- and full-day fishing (mainly fly-fishing) trips in remote areas of Los Glaciares National Park, in search of brown, rainbow, and brook trout. Full-day trips start at $225 (£152).

HORSEBACK RIDING Patagonia is horseback-riding heaven, and a number of agencies offer good trips. Whenever possible, try to get away from tours that depart directly from El Calafate. A company called **Cerro Frias,** Av. del Libertador 1857 (✆ **02902/492808;** www.cerrofrias.com), offers half-day horseback riding trips in the wide-open

plains of Patagonia that take you up to a gorgeous view point. Excursions include a spectacular barbecue lunch or dinner. **Cabalgata en Patagonia,** Av. del Libertador 4315 (✆ **02902/493278;** cabalgataenpatagonia@cotecal.com.ar), offers a 2-hour ride to Bahía Redonda for a panoramic view of El Calafate ($70/£47).

OFF-ROADING Four-wheel-drives have become a popular way to explore the wilderness around El Calafate. **Mil Outdoor Adventure,** Av. del Libertador 1029 (✆ **02902/491437**), takes you across rivers, over boulders, along ridges, and up to the El Calafate Balcony for a panoramic view. There are also fossils and rock mazes en route. **Patagonia Extrema,** Av. del Libertador 1341 (✆ **02902/492393;** www.southroad.com.ar), has 4×4 trips in Land Cruisers to the Cerro Huyliche, with a stop for an afternoon *yerba mate* break.

VISITING AN ESTANCIA As the world's wool market declines, many of the *estancias* (ranches) in Patagonia have opened their doors to tourists, including some very close to El Calafate. This is the heart of the real Patagonia. Trips typically run day activities and restaurant services, and many even offer lodging, should you opt to spend the night. They're a lovely way to experience the local history, immerse yourself in the wild landscapes, and live Patagonia as authentically as possible. Most day excursions include a choice of horseback riding, hiking, or bird-watching, as well as a hearty traditional meal, usually of barbecued local *cordero* (lamb). All of the following *estancias* offer meals, excursions such as horseback riding and trekking, and transportation from El Calafate. Most also have museums in the old family ranch homes. Close to town, **El Galpón del Glaciar** (✆ **02902/491793;** www.elgalpondelglaciar.com.ar) adds traditional *estancia* activities, such as sheep-shearing, and has a lovely afternoon tea. It's also a good spot for an evening visit; dinner shows with folklore dancing start at 6pm (reservations required). My favorite of the bunch is **Estancia Cristina** ★★, situated at the end of the remote north arm of Lago Argentino. See "Where to Stay," below, for more information. You take a spectacular 4-hour boat trip to get there, sailing past floating icebergs and the enormous Upsala Glacier. Day trips include a hike with excellent views of Cerro Norte and the Patagonian Ice Cap, a 4WD trip, or a lovely horseback ride. Contact their office in El Calafate at 9 de Julio 57, Loc. 10 (✆ **02902/491133;** www.estanciacristina.com).

The meticulously maintained **Estancia Alta Vista** (✆ **02902/491247;** altavista@cotecal.com.ar), 33km (20 miles) from El Calafate, on the dirt road RP 15 near the beautiful area of Lago Roca, is open October through March and offers ranch activities and fishing. It has an English-country style that has made it popular with British genteel types. **Hostería de Campo Nibepo Aike** (✆ **02902/492797;** http://nibepoaike.com.ar) is picturesquely nestled on the southeast edge of the national park, about 60km (37 miles) from El Calafate. It's also near Lago Roca, offering fishing and ranch activities October through April. An overnight here is a slightly less than at other local *estancias.*

On the lakefront just beside town, **Parque De La Bahía,** Padre Agostini and Avenida Costaner (✆ **02902/496555**), has a nightly shearing show and in-depth presentation on all things wool- and sheep-related. After a lively demonstration of dogs herding sheep, you get a chance to feed a baby lamb from a bottle, and then head indoors for a hearty lamb dinner with a folklore show. There are also midday options with lunch included.

WHERE TO STAY

New hotels and *hosterías* are opening up every month in El Calafate. The bulk of them are 15-room inns in the outskirts of town. Really good value is hard to find here; most places are capitalizing on the short tourist season. Prices soar from December through

February, making October to November and March to April the most economical time to visit. The main issue to resolve when selecting lodging in El Calafate is if you want to stay in town or not. There is a slew of mediocre inns within walking distance of the main drag, Avenida del Liber tador. Then there are more about 10 to 15 minutes away , and most of these hotels offer complimentary shuttles to town, as well as better views. Finally, there are options significantly far from town, which will appeal to those looking to relax and stay still.

Estancias

Eolo Patagonia's Spirit ★★ Finds Inspired by the ever-present Patagonian winds, Eolo is a new take on the old-style ranch. Built around a protected courtyard, it is upscale through and through, yet casual and comfor table. Expansive cream-colored rooms have huge windo ws and a mixtur e of ne w and antique furnishings. B athrooms have refurbished mirrors, vanities, and deep tubs with windo ws looking out to the v astness. The corner suite has a view of the Torres del Paine on a clear day. No matter which way you look, there are sublime expanses outside with no trace of civilization in sight. Only 25km (15 miles) from El Calafate, and en r oute to the P erito Moreno Glacier, the location is convenient to town, the airport, and the main tourist attractions, making it much mor e convenient than Eolo's competitors, and a good place to base a trip lasting fr om 3 to 5 days. Most people come her e as an all-inclusiv e package that includes transfers and all meals, as well as trekking, bird-watching, and horseback riding. Or you can just relax by the indoor heated pool. The unpretentious and flexible staff will call y ou by name and make you feel at home. F or a place with only 17 r ooms, Eolo offers a remarkably complete experience.

RP 11, K m 23, El C alafate. ✆ **02902/492042,** or 11/4700-0075 in Buenos Air es for reservations. www.eolo.com.ar. 17 units. 2-night packages start at $720 (£486) per person double; 4-night packages start at $1,120 (£755) per person double . Rates include all meals , airport transfers, and ex cursions. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; indoor pool; sauna; guided ex cursions; high-speed I nternet; library; TV room. *In room:* Safe.

Estancia Cristina ★★★ Moments If seclusion is the new luxury, this *estancia* is the ultimate indulgence. S ituated at the end of the nor th arm of Lago Argentino, it 's the well-preserved former ranching outpost of the Masters family, early-20th-century British pioneers. To get here (see "Visiting an Estancia," above), you take a spectacular 4-hour boat trip , sailing past floating icebergs and the enormous U psala G lacier. O ne- and 2-night packages allow you to choose from a selection of day ex cursions such as tr eks, a 4WD trip, or a wonderful horseback ride. Upon return, you'll have the place to yourself, once the day-trippers have headed back to town. At night, the silence and dar kness will astound you. Relax in a soaker tub , explore the Masters family museum, r oam the English gardens, enjoy bird-watching, or sidle up to the bar for a glass of *vino tinto*. Twelve rooms have been designed to r esemble the older ranch buildings, with light gr een roofs and white walls. I nside, they're clean, spacious, and fr esh, with large beds and huge bay windows that open onto the Cerr o N orte. The food is ex cellent, and the ser vice is friendly and charming. The modern facilities don't detract from the histor y or majestic setting of the place. Both gentle and r ugged, new and old, Estancia C ristina is a gem, making it a fav orite of so many P atagonian travelers. If you can splurge for just 1 night in Patagonia, do it here.

9 de Julio 57, local 10, El C alafate. ✆ **02902/491133,** or 11/4814-3934 in Buenos Air es for reservations. www.estanciacristina.com. From $455 (£307) per person double. Rates include all meals, excursions, and transfers. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; hiking trails; Internet; library; museum. *In room:* Safe.

Very Expensive

Casa los Sauces Not only is the current President of Argentina, Cristina Kirchner, the owner and next-door neighbor of this exclusive boutique hotel, she was also the interior designer. And she's obviously got good taste, exemplified in the genteel Argentine country style that oozes through the four separate houses dotting this green property by the lake. It's all very refined, luxurious and, frankly, quite snobby. There's a large staff ready to wait on you, from offering glasses of champagne at check-in or a ride in a golf cart to massages and private transfers. The 38 über-plush suites, each drastically different in style, are located in five houses dotted about a meticulously maintained green garden. There is a minimum 2-night stay; most guests come here as part of an all-inclusive program. For a taste of the exclusivity, come for dinner at the excellent restaurant, La Comarca.

Los Gauchos 1352–1370, El Calafate. ✆ **02902/495584,** or 11/4348-5288 in Buenos Aires. www.casalossauces.com. 38 units. $600 (£405) per person per night all-inclusive; $360 (£243) per person per night B&B program. AE, MC, DC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; spa; bikes; transfers; game room; archery; reading room; Wi-Fi. *In room:* Safe, minibar.

Posada Los Alamos Overrated The sprawling Posada Los Alamos is as conservative as a Brooks Brothers suit, perhaps better suited to a golf resort than wild Patagonia. Because of the low-key design of the complex and the slightly aloof service, you can't help the feeling that you're in a private country club or thousands of miles north in a Buenos Aires province. They have just about everything here, including a new spa with a huge pool, wine bar, convention center, and hair salon. There are a number of comfortable lounges in the hotel's various buildings, all with large windows looking out onto an expansive (and expensive-to-maintain) lawn. Rooms have ample space, and each has a slightly different color and style. Ask for one that looks out onto the quiet, grassy backyard instead of the dusty dirt road.

Gobernador Moyano and Bustillo, El Calafate. ✆ **02902/491144.** Fax 02902/491186. www.posadalosalamos.com. 144 units. $314 (£212) double; from $411 (£277) suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; lounge; golf course; tennis court; tour desk; room service; massage; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, minibar, safe.

Expensive

Esplendor el Calafate ★ Creative and modern, the Esplendor excels with a warm and cozy feeling. This former white elephant was transformed in 2006 into a sleek new multistory hotel with a unique earthy style and stunning windows. It calls itself a boutique inn, but, with 57 rooms, it's quite big. The vast lobby has 20m (66-ft.) ceilings, a huge fireplace, a long line of Mac computers, and low leather sofas. Rooms are dotted with warm fabrics such as wool and suede, and the crisp microcement floors are surprisingly warm. The curtains, with built-in fabric window slots, give you both privacy and a view. The king-size beds are covered in white linens and knitted blankets. Bathrooms include stand-up showers, separated sinks, and soaker cement tubs. More towel racks would help. Rooms on the second floor are the largest; third-floor rooms have wooden angled ceilings. There've been complaints lately of a noisy next-door disco. Ask the hotel if this has been solved before booking. Staff is young and attractive (another bonus).

Pte. Perón 1143, El Calafate. ✆ **02902/492454,** or 11/5217-5700 in Buenos Aires for reservations. www.esplendorcalafate.com. 57 units. From $145 (£98) double; $208 (£140) suite. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; business center; room service; laundry service. *In room:* TV, minibar, safe.

Hotel Edenia ★ This is a very comfortable and functional new hotel on the outskirts of town. The view out your window just may include an iceberg or two here. Rooms are similar to what you'd find in a classy business hotel, with crisp linens, satellite TV, a workable desk, and individually controlled heaters. Bathrooms are large and have heated floors. Edenia's best asset, though, is its friendly, multilingual staff who'll welcome you with a glass of champagne, and take good care of you as you rush in and out from the many excursions typical of a visit to El Calafate. Visit their website for online promotions.

Punta Soberana, Manzana 642, El Calafate. ✆ **02902/497021**. Fax 2902/496210. www.edeniahoteles.com.ar. 68 units. $147–$256 (£99–£173) double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; gym; transfers; room service; laundry; library; Wi-Fi. *In room:* Satellite TV, hair dryer, safe.

Kau Yatún Hotel de Campo ★ Long before El Calafate was a major tourist destination, it was the heart of a rugged area populated by remote *estancias* (ranches). Kau Yatún is a country inn located on the Estancia 25 de Mayo, only 5 blocks from El Calafate's main drag. Use one of their bikes to ride into town. It has a lovely rural charm, with generous green spaces, quiet corners, and a relaxed air. Rooms are very large, with thick walls and ceilings. Bathrooms, likewise, are very large but are dated. The hallway can be noisy. The restaurant and bar are both pricey, but breakfasts are generous. Out back, besides 7 hectares (17 acres) of paradisiacal nature, is an excellent Argentine *parrilla.* When you are stuck trying to kill time in El Calafate, you'll be glad you choose Kau Yatún.

Estancia 25 de Mayo, El Calafate. ✆ **02902/491059,** or 11/4523-5894 in Buenos Aires. Fax 11/4523-5894; www.kauyatun.com. 44 units. $170–$210 (£115–£142) double; $300 (£203) triple. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; excursions; transfers; boutique; library. *In room:* Wi-Fi, hair dryer, safe.

Moderate

Hostería Lupama Compact in size but big in heart, this charming inn above the main part of town takes its name from a local aboriginal chief. You'll be drawn in by the towering windows and lovely wood architecture. The feeling inside is simple but rustic, with touches of wood and stone. Spacious rooms upstairs have nice views, particularly those on the town side, and king-size beds. Separated bathrooms all have jetted tubs. The two junior suites are slightly larger with two-person tubs. You can borrow DVDs from the video library to watch in your own room. The bilingual staff is hardworking and helpful.

Calle 992 no. 19, Villa Parque Los Glaciares, El Calfate. ✆ **02902/491110.** www.lupama.com.ar. 12 units. $160 (£108) double; $200 (£135) suite. Rates include breakfast. V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service; laundry; high-speed Internet; DVD library; lunch boxes. *In room:* TV/DVD player, minibar, safe.

Kau Kaleshen (Value) With an excellent location just a block and a half from the main drag, the Kau Kaleshen *hostería* is a simple and charming inn. It's been around long enough to feel warm and authentic. Rooms are all located around the tranquil back garden, some on a two-story yellow-walled building (the top floor rooms have better circulation). They all have rustic brick walls and ceramic floors; it's nothing fancy. Clean white bathrooms are also simple, with stand-up showers only. There is a lovely teahouse out front where breakfast is served.

Gobernador Gregores 1256, El Calafate. ✆ **02902/491188.** www.losglaciares.com/kaukaleshen. $80 (£54) double. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Teahouse; laundry service.

Patagonia Rebelde Moments History buffs will love the heritage items on display in this train-themed tin-walled *hostería* on the hill above town. Every item has a story behind it: The main room floors are recycled from a Buenos Aires conventillo, furniture is from auctions, even key chains are from old train cars. Others may find it noisy. Rooms are small but bright, with yellow walls and refurbished bureaus. All have showers only. The suite, in the corner, is slightly bigger and brighter.

José R. Haro 442, esq. Jean Mermoz, El Calafate. ✆ **02902/494495.** www.patagoniarebelde.com. 12 units. $118 (£80) double; $132 (£89) suite. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; library; Wi-Fi.

Inexpensive

America del Sur Hostel ★ With a friendly vibe and nightly all-you-can-eat *asado* barbecues for only $16 (£11), this is a great budget option. Located a 7-minute walk up the hill from downtown, it affords a lovely panoramic view. Guests have the choice of a simple bunk bed in a shared room that sleeps up to four people at a time, or one of the newer doubles with private bathrooms. All dorm rooms have private lockers and bathrooms with separate tubs, showers, and toilets that allow for some privacy in an otherwise shared room. The big kitchen is an upbeat place in which to mix and mingle with other travelers while saving some cash by dining in.

Puerto Deseado 153, El Calafate. ✆ **02902/493523.** www.americahostel.com.ar. 60 beds. $65 (£44) double with private bathroom; $16 (£11) bed in shared room. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Restaurant; transfers; laundry; high-speed Internet; kitchen; luggage storage. *In room:* Lockers.

Casa de Grillos B y B Finds This small inn, 8 blocks from Avenida del Libertador in the old part of town, is in one of El Calafate's only lush, green areas. Steps from Laguna Nimez and the shores of Lago Argentino, it's somewhat of an oasis and a nice choice for nature lovers who still want the convenience of being within walking distance from town. It's a true bed-and-breakfast, in that a lovely couple rents a handful of rooms in their home. Rooms are cozy, and each of the five rooms now has a private bathroom. There is a lovely common area for TV watching, Internet surfing, and visiting.

Los Condores 1215, esq. Las Bandurrias, El Calafate. ✆ **02902/491160.** www.casadegrillos.com.ar. 5 units. $55–$75 (£37–£51) double. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. **Amenities:** TV room; Internet; library.

WHERE TO DINE

A number of cafes and espresso bars run along the main drag, Libertador, and its side streets. Try **Elba'r,** in the De los Pajaros plaza at 9 de Julio 57 (✆ **02902/493594**). Or the interesting **Borges & Alvarez Libro-Bar,** Av. del Libertador 1015 (✆ **02902/491464**), which has a fantastic selection of books to peruse while you sip a *café con leche*. For a light snack, try **Almacenes Patagónicos,** at Av. del Libertador 1044 (✆ **02902/491042**).

Expensive

Casimiro Biguá ★★ Moments REGIONAL This sleek wine bar and restaurant is the best restaurant in El Calafate. The chic and modern black-and-white decor, thick tablecloths, flickering candles on every table, and young and energetic waitstaff make this place a winner. You can sample one of the many wines while enjoying an appetizer platter of regional Patagonian specialties such as smoked trout, smoked wild boar, and a

variety of cheeses. Main courses change frequently but usually range from a simple steak to an elaborate pasta with salmon, cream, and capers in white-wine sauce; there's always a chicken and seafood offering as well. The menu combines Argentine classics, such as empanadas and beef, with fusion-style dishes such as sesame tuna. It's also an excellent place to try a glass of dry Argentine sparkling wine. A few doors down is the sister restaurant, the town's most upscale steakhouse. And farther down the street is an Italian country-inspired trattoria (see below).

Av. del Libertador 963. ✆ **02902/492590.** Reservations recommended. Main courses $13–$22 (£8.80–£15). AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–1am.

Casimiro Biguá Trattoria Kids ITALIAN A breath of Mediterranean sunshine in the Patagonian wilderness, locals are raving about this new Italian-inspired informal eatery, run by the same folks as the popular bistro (above). The open kitchen and red-and-white checkered table cloths are bright and friendly. Mix and match homemade pastas with one of a huge variety of sauces—ricotta and nut ravioli goes great with pesto. Or try such classics as *osso buco* or lamb risotto. It's also a good option if you want a light dinner. Late afternoon, stop by for a glass of wine and a cheese plate.The wine list is long and includes plenty of options by the glass. There's a kids' room out back and Wi-Fi indoors.

Av. del Libertador 1369. ✆ **02902/492993.** Main courses $15–$22 (£10–£15). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight.

La Cocina ★ Value BISTRO This recently expanded restaurant serves bistro-style food, including fresh pastas, such as raviolis and fettuccine, fresh trout, and meats prepared simply but well. Try the crepes stuffed with vegetables (known as *cannelloni*) or combinations such as ham and cheese, or meat items such as steak with a pepper-and-mustard sauce. There's a huge list of pasta options as well. Of all the restaurants on the main street with a similar appearance, La Cocina, without a doubt, is the best. There is something here for everyone, and when it's busy, the friendly staff maintains an upbeat vibe.

Av. del Libertador 1245. ✆ **02902/491758.** Main courses $10–$19 (£6.80–£13). MC, V. Tues–Sun noon–3:30pm and 7pm–midnight.

La Posta ★★ ARGENTINE In a building next to the Posada Los Alamos hotel, the La Posta is El Calafate's most upscale restaurant, serving great cuisine and choice wines in a formal, candlelit environment. The menu, printed in four languages, offers well-prepared dishes that effectively blend Argentine and international-flavored fare, such as filet mignon in a puff pastry with rosemary-roasted potatoes, king crab ravioli, almond trout, or curried crayfish. Desserts are superb. A lovely breakfast buffet is served here for guests every morning, and the service both morning and night is exquisite.

Gobernador Moyano and Bustillo. ✆ **02902/491144.** Reservations recommended in high season. Main courses $12–$26 (£8.20–£18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7pm–midnight.

Moderate

Casablanca CAFE/BAR The Casablanca is the local hangout for a beer and a quick meal, and one of the few places around where you can grab a meal at odd hours. There's a wooden bar and a dining area with tile floors and metal chairs and tables, and an elevated TV that's usually on. The menu is mostly pizzas, sandwiches, and empanadas, but

sandwiches are your best bet here. This is a good spot for writing out postcards and sipping a cold beer on a warm afternoon.

Av. 21 de Mayo and Av. del Libertador 1202. ✆ **02902/491402.** Main courses $6–$16 (£4.05–£11); sandwiches $4.50–$8 (£3.05–£5.40). No credit cards. Daily 10am–3am.

La Tablita ★★ (Value) PARRILLA This is 100% typical Argentine food—the stuff that families from Iguazú to Ushuaia enjoy on any given Sunday afternoon. Carnivores need look no far ther. La Tablita is all about meat, and it 's one of the local favorites in town for its heaping platters and giant *parrilladas* (mixed grills) that come sizzling to your table on their own minibarbecues. The *parrilladas* for two cost $20 (£14), but they really serve three diners, given the size and assortment of chicken, sausage, beef, lamb, and a few innards you may or may not recognize. The filet mignon is incredibly tender here; at $11 (£7.45), it's one of the least expensive filets that we've ever had. The sunny, airy restaurant can be found on the other side of the bridge that spans the Arroyo Calafate, about a 2-minute walk from downtown.

Coronel Rosales 24. ✆ **02902/491065.** Reservations highly recommended. Main courses $13–$17 (£8.80–£12). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 7pm–midnight (Wed closed for lunch).

Parrilla Mi Viejo PARRILLA Mi Viejo is another local barbecue favorite, with enough variety on the menu to satisfy everyone. Mi Viejo (My Old Man) seems to refer to the crusty character manning the lamb barbecue spit at the restaurant's front entrance, serving up weighty, delicious cuts of meat. Three to five diners could eat from a $20 (£14) *parrillada* meat assortment, depending on their hunger. The menu also offers trout and salmon dishes and a few interesting plates such as pickled hare. Some decent wine options are less than $10 (£6.80) a bottle. The restaurant is on the main drag, and its dining room is warm and pleasant.

Av. del Libertador 1111. ✆ **02902/491691.** Main courses $10–$18 (£6.80–£12). MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 7pm–midnight.

Pura Vida ★ (Finds) VEGETARIAN/REGIONAL The friendliest place in town is a short walk from downtown, but it's worth finding. Set in a woodsy location overlooking the lake, it's the best place in El Calafate for home-style cuisine that offers good options for vegetarians. Try the delicious pumpkin soup (great after a blistery day in the wilds of Patagonia) or the gnocchi in saffron sauce. If you want to try a regional specialty, then go for the *cazuela de cordero* (hearty lamb stew with mushrooms). For dessert, both the rice pudding and the pumpkin ice cream are delicious. Fresh fruit shakes, sandwiches, and afternoon tea with homemade rolls and jams are also offered. Despite the outdated A-frame exterior, the service is laid-back, the crowd is young and relaxed, and the view of the lake is divine.

Av. del Libertador 1876. ✆ **02902/493356.** Main courses $8–$17 (£5.40–£12). No credit cards. Thurs–Tues 7:30–11:30pm.

Inexpensive

Viva la Pepa ★ (Kids) SNACKS A new spot that has fun vibes and healthy lighter options, Viva la Pepa specializes in crepes (both savory and sweet), salads, and sandwiches. Lots of juices, and a hearty breakfast, are also available. Hang out in the afternoon on the outdoor patio, or indoors with a sweet treat.

Emilio Amado 833. ✆ **02902/491880.** Main courses $5–$12 (£3.40–£8.20). No credit cards. Daily 9am–11pm.

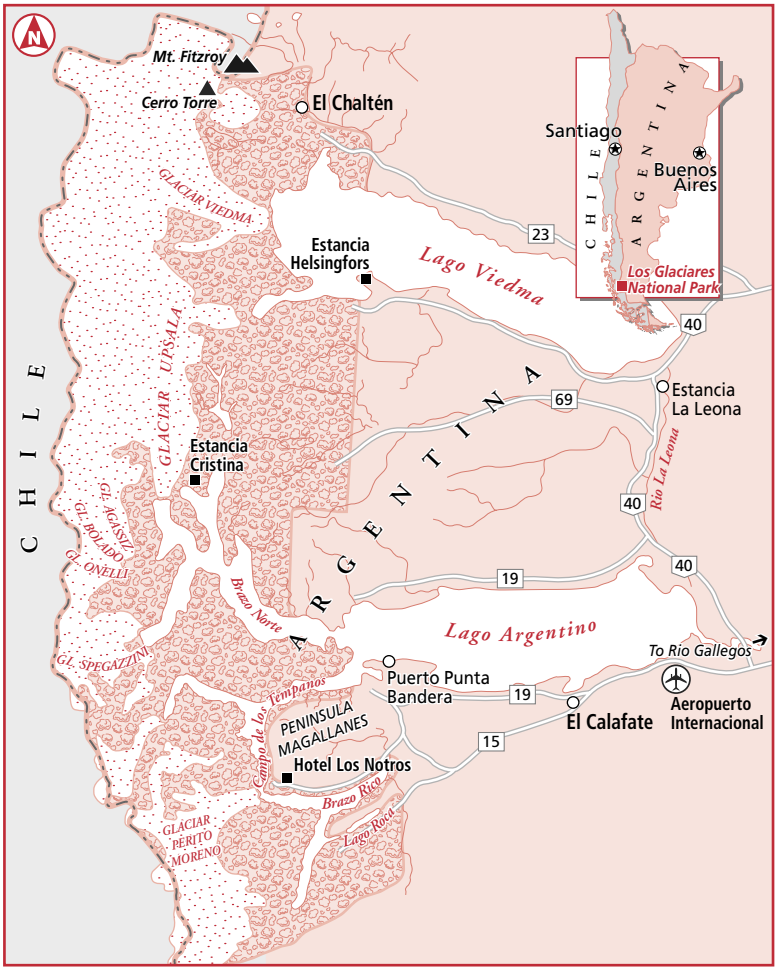
La Toderia, Av. del Liber tador 1177 (no phone), ser ves fast food during the day and funky music at night. **Humus,** Gobernador Moyano and Bustillo (✆ **02902/491144**) is a very popular wine bar at the Posada los Alamos. **Don Diego de la Noche,** Avenida del Libertador and 17 de Octuber (✆ **02902/493270**), remains the town's most happening late-night pub.

7 PARQUE NACIONAL LOS GLACIARES & PERITO MORENO GLACIER ★★★

The Los G laciares National Park covers 600,000 hectar es (1.5 million acr es) of r ugged land that str etches v ertically along the cr est of the Andes and spills east into r olling steppe. Most of Los Glaciares is inaccessible to visitors except for the park's two dramatic highlights: the granite needles, such as F itzRoy near El Chaltén (covered in "El Chaltén & the FitzRoy Area," below), and this r egion's magnificent P erito Moreno Glacier. The park is also home to thundering riv ers, blue lakes, and thick beech for est. Los G laciares National Park was formed in 1937 and declar ed a World Heritage region by UNESCO in 1981. It is a wild, r ugged, and yet sublimely beautiful landscape—one that offers up surprise, wonder, adventure, and serenity all at once.

Named after famed Argentine scientist Francisco "Perito" Moreno ("perito" is the title given to someone considered an expert in their field), the famous glacier P erito Moreno is a must-see, as impor tant to Argentine cultur e and tourism as Iguazú Falls or the Casa Rosada. Few natural wonders in South America are as spectacular or as easily accessed as this glacier. It's just one fingertip in the imposing Patagonian Ice Cap, the fourth-largest frozen mass in the world after the two poles and Greenland. Perito Moreno is one of the few glaciers in the world that is not r eceding. Scientists like to stay that it is " stable," or constantly growing and r eceding. Around 1900, P erito Moreno was measur ed at 750m (2,460 ft.) from the Península Magallanes; by 1920, it had advanced so far that it finally made contact with the peninsula wher e tourists no w walk the lo vely and ne wly r efurbished boardwalk and take in vie ws. Each time the glacier r eached the peninsula, which would occur ev ery 3 to 4 y ears, it cr eated a dam in the channel that drastically alter ed water levels on either side. Ov er the period of a fe w years, the built-up pr essure would set off a calving explosion for 48 to 72 hours, br eaking the face of the glacier in a crashing fury. The last time this happened was in July 2008, making news across the country. Perito Moreno is usually reliable for sending a few huge chunks the size of buses hurling into the channel thr oughout the day. Sit in silence with y our camera r eady and y ou're almost certain to get a fabulous photo oppor tunity of a calving glacier.

What impr esses visitors most is the sheer siz e of P erito M oreno G lacier—a wall of jagged blue ice measuring 4,500m (14,760 ft.) acr oss and soaring 60m (197 ft.) abo ve the channel. You literally could fit the entir e city of Buenos Aires on it. From the parking lot on the P enínsula M agallanes, a series of vista-point walkways descend, which take visitors directly to the glacier's face. It's an unforgettable, spellbinding experience, wor th taking in slowly so you can savor the view and capture the ice cracking off in photos or videos. You can join an organiz ed group for a walk on the glacier , and ther e ar e boat journeys leaving from Puerto Banderas for visits to the neighboring glaciers. I n 2008, a



major infrastr ucture expansion pr oject began at the P enínsula M agallanes, and alr eady includes r efurbished boar dwalk paths and a ne w cafeteria. D own the hill, at the dock, there's another large restaurant and a giant visitor center in the wor ks.

There are other magnificent glaciers in the national park, all are much harder to access than P erito M oreno but equally stunning. The U psala G lacier is the largest in S outh America, and the S pegazzini Glacier has the largest snout of all the glaciers in the par k. Onelli, S eco, and Agassiz ar e also gorgeous. All can be seen as par t of the **All Glaciers Tour,** organized by René Fernández Campbell, whose main office is at Av. del Libertador 867 (✆ **02902/492340**).

Glaciology 101

A glacier is a large body of snow and ice that slowly moves down a valley or spreads across a surface due to accumulation and gravity. Glacial ice forms when heavy snowfall crushes first into snow crystals and then into pellets, finally becoming a dense mass that takes on transparency and hardness over time. Heavy precipitation and low temperatures are the most significant factors in glacial growth. Dark lines in the glaciers, called moraines, are produced by rock debris, sand, and clay that accumulate on the ice. They are useful for indicating past positions of the glacier.

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND

At Km 49 (30 miles) from El Calafate, you'll pass through the park's entrance en route to the Perito Moreno Glacier, where there's an information booth with erratic hours (no phone). Here, they charge the entrance fee of $10 (£6.80) per person. They'll also give you a map if you ask for one. If you're looking for information about the park and the glacier, pick up an interpretive guide or a book from one of the bookstores or tourist shops along Avenida del Libertador in El Calafate.

To Get to the Park

BY CAR Following Avenida del Libertador west out of town, the route turns into a well-maintained road that is almost completely paved. From here, it's 80km (50 miles) to the glacier. Give yourself an hour and a half as the final stretch is on a winding road with a few unpaved sections.

BY TAXI OR REMISE If you want to see the glacier at your own pace, hire a taxi or *remise*. The cost averages $70 (£47) for two, $75 (£51) for three, and $100 (£68) for four, although many taxi companies will negotiate a price. Be sure to agree on an estimated amount of time spent at the glacier, and remember that the park entrance fee of $10 (£6.80) per person is not included.

BY BUS Caltur buses, Av. del Libertador 1080 (✆ **02902/491368**), leave downtown El Calafate twice a day (7am and 3pm, returning from the glacier at 11:30am and 7:30pm), allowing you to explore the glacier lookout area on your own. The bus ride costs a very reasonable $18 (£12), plus the $10 (£6.80) park entrance fee. **Los Glaciares,** Brown 1188 (✆ **02902/491158**), has buses departing town at 7:30am, 8am and 3pm, returning at 7pm. They take 90 minutes to get to the lookout. All depart from the bus terminal.

BY ORGANIZED TOUR Several companies offer transportation to and from the glacier, such as **Gigantes Patagones,** Av. Del Libertador 1315, Loc. 3 (✆ **02902/495525;** www.gigantespatagones.com.ar); **Caltur,** Av. del Libertador 1080 (✆ **02902/491368;** www.caltur.com.ar); and **Los Glaciares Turismo,** Av. Almirante Brown 1188 (✆ **02902/491159**). These minivan and bus services provide bilingual guides and leave around 9am and again at around 2:30pm, spending an average of 4 hours at the peninsula; the cost is $30 to $50 (£20–£34) per person, not including lunch. For a more personalized tour—a private car with driver and a bilingual, licensed guide—contact **SurTurismo,** Av. Del Libertador 1226 (✆ **02902/491266;** suring@cotecal.com.ar); they can arrange for a half-day trip costing $70 to $105 (£47–£71) for two people (prices vary with the seasons).

How to See the Glacier

Do not miss the chance to see the majestic Perito Moreno Glacier, one of the world's most stunning sites and a great lesson in nature. You've got a number of options for making your visit worthwhile, depending on your time frame and budget.

- Rent a car and drive to the glacier from town. This option is not cheap unless you are a group of four. It's helpful if you have a midday flight and gives you freedom to come late in the afternoon, when the crowds have petered off.
- Take the local bus that has three departures daily. It's the best budget option, and a good choice if you want to stick to your own schedule.
- Hop on a local tour. This gives you more information and understanding of what you're looking at. But you're stuck with the tour's schedule. Some tours offer a short hike along Icebergs Channel (Canal de los Témpanos) or boat trips along the north wall. Most are bilingual, and some include snacks.
- Sign up for Hielo y Aventura's Minitrekking, to take a walk on the ice and get a good look at its southern wall along the Rico Arm of Lago Argentino. It's a half-day outing; you can include a stroll on the boardwalks.
- For an in-depth and unforgettable exploration of the big white sheet, Hielo y Aventura's Big Ice is the most complete glacier experience. A good level of fitness is required.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

You can see the Perito Moreno glacier close up on your own in a half-day's outing by taxi, rental car, or bus (give yourself a minimum of 1 hr. at the glacier). But several exciting activities in the Perito Moreno region afford a more in-depth and thrilling experience. **"Minitrekking"** (although there is nothing "mini" about it) takes guests of all ages and abilities for a walk upon the glacier. The trip begins with a 20-minute boat ride across the Brazo Rico, followed by a 30-minute walk to the glacier. From here guests are outfitted with crampons and other safety gear, and then they spend approximately 1½ hours atop the ice, complete with a stop for a whiskey on the thousand-year-old "rocks." This great trip gives visitors the chance to peer into the electric-blue crevasses of the glacier and fully appreciate its size. More experienced, fit, and adventurous visitors can opt for the **Big Ice** ★★ option, which has a more technical approach and gives you much more time (upwards of 4 hr.) to walk on the glacier. Both Big Ice and Minitrekking are organized exclusively by **Hielo y Aventura,** which has its main office at Av. del Libertador 935 (✆ **02902/492205;** www.hieloyaventura.com). Big Ice costs $175 (£118) including the transfer from El Calafate. Minitrekking will run you $135 (£74) with transfer. Remember, you have to bring your own lunch from town. And don't forget the sunscreen!

Solo Patagonia, Av. del Libertador 867 (✆ **02902/491105;** www.solopatagonia.com), offers visitors navigation trips through the Brazo Rico to the face of Perito Moreno for $50 (£34), departing hourly from 10:30am to 3:30pm from the Muelle Moreno port next to the glacier's visitor center. Their **Todo Glaciares** ★★ trip departs from Puerto

Deep in the Heart of Patagonia: Hostería Helsingfors

Remote, warm, and widely admired, **Hostería Helsingfors,** open from October to March, is located on the shore of Lago Viedma about 150km (93 miles) from El Calafate. On a clear day, it has amazing views of FitzRoy. With a lovely main lodge and endless miles of untouched wilderness at its doorstep, Helsingfors offers lodging, horseback riding, over-flights, bird-watching, boat trips, and fine dining. For more information, contact their offices in Buenos Aires at Av. Córdoba 827, 11th floor (✆/fax **011/4315-1222;** www.helsingfors.com.ar).

Punta Bandera and visits the Spegazzini (the tallest glacier in the park), Upsala (the largest), and Onelli glaciers for $295 (£199). They also have a day trip to spectacular Estancia Cristina (see "Where to Stay," earlier in this chapter) via the Upsala Glacier.

LODGING NEAR THE GLACIER

Los Notros ★★★ (Moments) Few hotels in Argentina (or in the world) boast as spectacular a view as Los Notros—but it doesn't come cheap. This luxury lodge sits high on a slope looking out at Perito Moreno Glacier, and all common areas and rooms have been fitted with picture windows to let guests soak up the marvelous sight. Although the wood-hewn exteriors give the hotel the feel of a mountain lodge, the interior decor is contemporary. Each room is slightly different, with personal touches such as antique lamps and regional photos; crocheted or gingham bedspreads; lilac, peach, or lemon-yellow walls; padded floral headboards or iron bed frames; and tweedy brown or raspberry corduroy chairs. Bathrooms are gleaming white if a bit small, and premium rooms in the newer wing have whirlpool tubs. The older "Cascada bungalow" rooms have very thin walls; if you're a light sleeper, be sure to request a top-floor room or a room in the newer "Premium" (and more expensive) wing.

Inside the main building is a large, chic, and expansive restaurant that serves creative regional cuisine. Upstairs is an airy lounge area with chaise longues positioned in front of panoramic windows; here you'll find a TV room with a selection of nature videos. Guests at the Los Notros must opt for one of the multiday packages that include airport transfers, meals, box lunches for expeditions, guided trekking, boat excursions, and ice walks. The guides are great, but hotel service is a bit spotty, and the restaurant is definitely understaffed. Although Los Notros offers 4-night packages, you might find that length of time too long, limiting your chance to see other parts of Patagonia. Note that prices jump substantially during Christmas, New Year's, and Easter week. One-night stays are on request only, and sold only subject to availability

Main office in Buenos Aires: Arenales 1457, 7th floor. ✆ **11/5277-8200.** Fax 11/5277-8222. www.losnotros.com. 32 units. $1,287 (£869) per person for 2-night package Cascada bungalow; $1,752 (£1,182) per person for 2-night package in double superior; $2,054 (£1,386) per person for 2-night package in double premium. Rates include all meals, park entrance, excursions, and transfers. Room-only rates available by request only, depending on availability. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; lounge; tour desk; room service; laundry service; video library. *In room:* Minibar.

MarPatag Cruise ★★ **Moments** If you think Patagonia is a place for quiet contemplation, you'll love the MarPatag cruise, even if the price is tough to swallow. It's truly an exclusive experience: You'll join no more than 45 others and spend 48 hours cruising the majestic waters of Lago Argentino aboard a cozy cruiser, getting intimate and close-up views of many glaciers, and relaxing in your snug, private cabin at night aboard this deluxe catamaran. The company has been running these trips for a few years on a smaller, more intimate boat. But in 2009, they launched a new boat with 22 cabins, each with a private bathroom, on three stories. Nights are spent moored off the coast in a sheltered bay. There are large windows, outdoor decks, and plenty of cozy common spaces. The package includes full meals and transfers, and lovely onboard staff.

9 de Julio 57, Office 10, El Calafate. ✆ **02902/492118.** www.crucerosmarpatag.com. 21 cabins. $825 (£557) per person double. Rates include all meals and transfers. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; library.

8 EL CHALTEN & THE FITZROY AREA ★★

222km (138 miles) N of El Calafate

El Chaltén is a rugged village of about 700 residents whose lifeblood, like El Calafate's, is the throng of visitors who come each summer. Visitors here, however, are generally more active and adventurous than those who stay only in El Calafate; they include some of the world's greatest mountaineers as well as avid trekkers. This is the second-most-visited region of Argentina's Los Glaciares National Park. It's quite possibly the most exquisite, as well, due to the singular nature of the granite spires that shoot up, torpedo-like, above massive tongues of ice that descend from the Southern Patagonian Ice Field. In the world of mountaineering, the sheer and ice-encrusted peaks of Mt. FitzRoy, Cerro Torre, and their neighbors are considered some of the most formidable challenges on the planet, and they draw hundreds of elite climbers here every year. The valleys beneath them provide absolutely world-class trekking trails that any hiker can enjoy. Besides trekking, there are also interesting new options for kayaking, bird-watching, and mountain biking here.

El Chaltén is known as the "trekking capital of Argentina," and it ranks up there with the best trekking destinations in the world. What it offers—excellent trails in spectacularly wild scenery, mixed with cozy inns and bistros that you can return to at night—is quite rare. Another bonus is that the hiking here doesn't require any serious uphill (or downhill for that matter) climbs, as most trails follow valley floors. Finally, altitude is not a concern, meaning that your lungs should have no problem taking in some of the cleanest air on the planet.

Little more than 10 years ago, El Chaltén counted just a dozen houses and a *hostal* or two, but FitzRoy's rugged beauty and great hiking opportunities have created somewhat of a boomtown. The town sits nestled in a circular rock outcrop at the base of FitzRoy, and it's fronted by the vast, dry Patagonian Steppe. It's a wild and windy setting, and the town has a ramshackle feel, although recent street paving has helped clean things up a lot. Visitors use El Chaltén either as a base from which to take day hikes or as an overnight stop before setting off for a multiday backpacking trip. This area is also remarkably rich in human history, from its hardy early settlers and courageous alpinists, to more recent political border disputes with Chile.

El Chaltén has definitely taken a turn upscale over the past few years, first with the Los Cerros hotel, and now with the planned arrival of two more luxury lodges—run by the same folks behind Explora in Torres del Paine and by Eolo outside El Calafate. Both are just in early stages, and will be located on the road north from El Chaltén toward Lago del Desierto.

Populated by folk with a pioneering spirit, El Chaltén has a cool, young vibe.

Most visitors come here for 4 days, with 2 travel days on each end. If you take the early morning bus from El Calafate, you'll be here with time for a good half-day hike. Most hotels offer a catering service that prepares box lunches you can take with you on the trail. Don't hit the trail without food!

The town's layout is somewhat haphazard, but a new bus terminal at the entrance to town, scheduled to open in 2009, will help orient tourists when they hop off the bus from El Calafate. Güemes and San Martín are the main drags; most hotels and restaurants don't have street numbers.

ESSENTIALS

Getting There

BY PLANE All transportation to El Chaltén originates from El Calafate, which has daily plane service from Ushuaia and Buenos Aires. From El Calafate, you need to take a bus or rent a car; the trip takes from 3 to 3½ hours.

BY CAR From El Calafate, take RN 11 west for 30km (19 miles) and turn left on RN 40 north. Turn again, heading northwest, on RP 23 to El Chaltén. The only place for a midtrip pit stop is the historic Estancia La Leona, where you can grab a snack and a coffee. The route is now almost entirely paved.

BY BUS Buses from El Calafate leave from the terminal, and all cost about $30 (£20) round-trip. A giant new bus terminal is being built in El Chaltén at the entrance to town. In the meantime, buses continue to use their normal drop off/pick up locations listed here. **Chaltén Travel,** with offices in El Chaltén at Avenida Güemes and Lago del Desierto (✆ **02962/493092;** www.chaltentravel.com), leaves El Calafate daily at 8am, 1pm (Jan and Feb only), and 6:30pm, and El Chaltén at 7:30am, 1pm (Jan–Feb only), and 6pm, departing from the Rancho Grande hostel. Chaltén Travel can arrange private tours and day trips to outlying destinations such as Patagonian ranches, as well as summer-only transportation up RN 40 for those crossing into Chile. **Caltur,** which leaves from El Chaltén's Hostería Fitz Roy, at Av. San Martín 520 (✆ **02962/493062;** www.caltur.com.ar), leaves El Calafate daily at 7:30am and 6:30pm, and leaves El Chaltén at 3pm.

VISITOR INFORMATION

There is a $10 (£6.80) fee to enter the park, which is charged when buses stop at the APN Intendencia (park service) at the entrance to town (✆ **02962/493004**). Park wardens give a good intro to the park in English. El Chaltén also has a well-organized visitor center at the town's entrance—the **Comisión de Fomento,** Perito Moreno and Avenida Güemes (✆ **02962/493011**), open daily from 8am to 8pm. Here you'll find maps, pamphlets, and brief interpretive displays about the region's flora and fauna. In El Calafate, the **APN Intendencia (park service)** has its offices at Av. del Libertador 1302. Its visitor center is open daily from 9am to 3pm (✆ **02962/493004**).

There is neither a bank nor an ATM in El Chaltén. Many inns, restaurants, and stores don't take credit cards, because phone lines are sketchy. So be sure to stop in for cash at a bank in El Calafate.

Finally, I can't emphasize enough how prepared you must be for the weather in El Chaltén. Often, there are severe winds, rain, and storms that will keep you indoors for your entire stay and offer not a single glimpse of the glorious peaks. Dress appropriately, and try to embrace the wild weather that brings so much character to Patagonia.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Tour Operators

Fitz Roy Expediciones ★★, Av. San Martín 5 (✆/fax **02962/493017;** www.fitzroyexpediciones.com.ar), offers a variety of trekking excursions, including a complete 9-day circuit around the backside of the FitzRoy and Cerro Torre peaks on the spectacular Patagonian Ice Cap, for $1,850 (£1,249) per person, all equipment and meals included, as well as 2 nights' lodging in an *albergue.* This is a trip for hard-core adventurers only. They also have an excellent day trip to Lago del Desierto, which includes a short hike or boat cruise and lunch at their adventure camp, which offers rafting trips. The full-day trip costs $75 (£51) and is a good option on a stormy day, as the weather is often better toward Lago del Desierto than in El Chaltén. Finally, they have multisport trips, with river kayak trips, mountain biking, and horseback riding from their lovely FitzRoy Adventure Camp, just north of El Chaltén.

Boat Trips

The rugged and wild Viedma Glacier is accessed from El Chaltén. It's a powerful place where you can strap on some crampons and go explore some magical ice. **PatagoniaAventura** ★ (✆ **02962/493110;** www.patagonia-aventura.com) currently has the concession to run this excursion. They have four categories of excursions: Viedma Light is a half-day boat trip, where you don't step on the ice; Viedma Trek includes a light hike at the base of the glacier; Viedma Ice Trek is a crampons-on trek atop the glacier; and finally, Viedma Pro is an ice trek that includes a short course in ice climbing. All include transfers from El Chaltén, but not lunch—you must bring your own food. Another interesting boat trip is across the remote Lago del Desierto, which, despite its name, is in one of the most lush valleys in southern Patagonia. See above for booking details.

Horseback Riding

There's nothing like horseback riding in Patagonia, and the gauchos at **El Relincho,** Avenida del Libertador (✆ **02962/493007**), have been leading rides from their stables in "downtown" El Chaltén for years.

Hiking & Camping

El Chaltén is Argentina's national trekking capital and home to some very good hiking guides who'll take you out for an afternoon stroll, a full-day trek, or even a multiday hiking expedition. The best can be found at **Mountaineering Patagonia,** whose office is at E. Brenner 88 (✆ **02962/493915;** www.mountaineeringpatagonia.com). Also try Manuel Quiroga, at **El Chaltén Mountain Guides** (no phone; www.ecmg.com.ar). They also can arrange more-challenging mountaineering objectives, such as climbs of local peaks, multiday treks to Paso Marconi, and weeklong traverses of the majestic Southern Ice Field.

Although the trails here are generally very well marked, a local guide will help you to have a much more enjoyable experience. Guides will help you understand the natural history, learn about amazing mountaineering feats that took place in the area, and ensure safety. If you're planning to hike in the park, you'll want to pick up a copy of Zagier & Urruty's trekking map, *Monte FitzRoy & Cerro Torre,* available at most bookstores and

tourist shops in El Calafate and El Chaltén. You'll also need to register at the park service office at the entrance to El Chaltén. The best thing about hiking in El Chaltén is that almost all trails start and end in the town itself, meaning you can return each evening for a hot shower, a nice meal, and a good bed. Two standard half-day hikes leave from town: Laguna Capri, which offers a marvelous view of FitzRoy, and the Laguna Torre Lookout. For full-day hikes, the best are Laguna Torre and Laguna de los Tres. Trails here run from easy to difficult, and they take anywhere from 4 to 10 hours to complete. See below for trail descriptions.

Trails in the El Chaltén Area

The El Chaltén area of Los Glaciares National Park has incredible trails for hikers, not to mention imposing challenges for alpinists and mountaineers. The beauty of this area, besides the stunning scenery, is that the valleys are long and don't require too much uphill or downhill hiking, and you can make it back to town each night to a warm shower and good dinner. While overnight camping trips are available, El Chaltén excels in its proximity to day-hike trail heads. Unlike the Torres del Paine hikes, which generally require a few nights of camping, all of the main highlights here can be seen in a few day hikes.

What makes hiking in El Chaltén so good is the varied terrain and the relatively little climbing required to get amazing views. These hikes all leave from town and run from easy to difficult. They'll each allow you to see the famous spires from many angles. The times given are estimates for the average walker from El Chaltén. ***Note:*** These trips are listed according to difficulty, from easy to strenuous.

Cascada Chorrillo del Salto The easiest and flattest hike in the area, this trail is level and stays along the El Chaltén valley floor. Follow the Rio de las Vueltas riverbank northeast of town to the Chorrillo del Salto waterfall, which emerges from a dense forest. Give yourself an hour each way to walk at an easy pace.

Return 90 min. 4km (2.5 miles) one-way. Easy.

Cerro Torre Lookout Known as "El Mirador del Cerro Torre" in Spanish, this is a nice half-day hike. The trail head is behind the Los Cerros hotel. After climbing 200m (656 ft.) to get above the El Chaltén valley, you'll stroll along a raging glacial FitzRoy River, through thick beech forests, meeting a spectacular view of the needlelike Cerro Torre, with its namesake lake and glacier in front. This is an excellent way to sample some of the world's finest trekking and a great choice if you arrive midday. Climb off to the left (river side) of the trail for the lookout at Cerro Dos Condores.

Return 3 hr. 3km (2 miles) one-way. Easy to medium.

Laguna Capri ★ A bit longer than the other great local half-day hike to the Cerro Torre Lookout, Laguna Capri is the must-see destination for lovers of the FitzRoy massif. The trail leads north from town past Cerro Rosado before heading west toward Mt. FitzRoy. Many trekkers come here as a pilgrimage to one of the world's finest granite mountains, saving some time to scour the walls of FitzRoy with binoculars, to look for climbers. It's a 2-hour hike into the lagoon, following the same trail that leads to the Poincenot camp.

Return 4-hr. 7km (4 miles) one-way. Easy to medium.

Laguna Torre ★★ Continuing past the Cerro Torre lookout (see above), the trail winds its way up the FitzRoy River to the sheltered nook at the D'Agostini campground, which is a good spot for a protected picnic. From here, you climb up over the moraine and face first into the howling wind for a jaw-dropping close-up of Cerro Torre, its

Patagonia's Famous Peaks

The Cerro Torre and FitzRoy groups may be two of the alpine world's most recognized skylines, made famous by decades of unbelievable mountaineering feats, and by the U.S.-based Patagonia Inc. clothing company, which chose this horizon as its company's logo. Climbers consider these among the toughest challenges on the planet. They are also a remarkable display of natural beauty, with a rich human history of struggle, controversy, and extraordinary achievement. Whether you're a serious climber or a nonclimbing mountain lover, these peaks are sure to inspire. From left to right, on those exceptional clear days, here is what's making your jaw drop:

- **Cerro Torre:** At 3,102m (10,174 ft.), this granite needle sticks straight into the sky. Its first ascent has been the subject of debate for 50 years, since photographer and climber Tony Egger disappeared on what climbing partner Cesare Maestri claimed was the first summit. Maestri's account has been long doubted and debated. A recent team of climbers followed the route Maestri described and found it impossible to climb, with no apparent evidence of previous attempts.
- **Cerro Standhart:** The granite needle Standhart, at 2,650m (8,692 ft.), is seen as a good warm-up for those attempting the summit of Cerro Torre.
- **Torre Egger:** Named after Tony Egger, who allegedly climbed what was considered the hardest mountain climb in the world with Maestri in 1956. When Egger disappeared on the descent, along with his camera, he shattered the credibility of the summit Maestri claimed.
- **Pico Poincenot:** The big one to the left of FitzRoy group, this spire reaches 3,002m (9,846 ft.).
- **Mt. FitzRoy:** Named for Sir Robert FitzRoy, the Captain of HMCS *Beagle,* which brought Charles Darwin on his first voyage to South America, this magnetic giant stands 3,405m tall (11,168 ft.). For generations, the local Tehuelche people have called FitzRoy "El Chaltén," or volcano, because it is almost always covered by clouds, which they confused for smoke. To the left of FitzRoy are the spires Agujas, St. Exupery, and Rafael Juarez. To the right are Mermoz and Guillaumet.

glacier, and its milky blue lake. Next to the Torre Glacier, you have a glimpse of the Grande Glacier. This is a 22km (12-mile) round-trip; plan for 3 hours each way. There are also good views of Mt. Solo and the Adela chain en route. If you have time left at the lake, scramble to the north shore of Laguna Torre to Mirador Maestri. For an even fuller day, you can include a hike with crampons on the Torre Glacier as well, though this must be done with a guide from Fitz Roy Expediciones (see "Tour Operators," above).

Return 6- to 7-hr. 11km (7 miles) one-way. Medium.

Laguna de los Tres ★★ The best full-day hike in El Chaltén takes you along the Chorrillo del Salto river past the campground at Poincenot—which is probably the best and most centrally located campground in the area—and over the Rio Blanco before the

final steep climb (400m/1,312 ft., which will take you an hour) up to the gorgeous Laguna de los Tres, nestled beneath the giant granite walls of Mt. FitzRoy.

10-hr. return. 13km (8 miles) one-way. Medium to difficult.

Pilar-Río Blanco–Poincenot This alternative to the Laguna de los Tres trek starts at Hostería el Pilar and heads back to El Chaltén via Río Blanco. The advantage is that it's a one-way trail (one of the only), so you are not retracing your steps. To make it to Laguna de los Tres, though, you need to get a very early start. You'll need a shuttle one-way to get to the trail head on the banks of the Río Eléctrico, at Hostería El Pilar, 17km (11 miles) from El Chaltén. Many local companies, including Mountaineering Patagonia (see above), can help you organize this. From here it's a gradual climb to Laguna Capri (see above) before dropping back into El Chaltén.

Circuit 9 hr. 20km (12 miles) total. Medium to difficult.

WHERE TO STAY

As the distances from El Calafate shrinks, thanks to highway pavement, El Chaltén is taking a swing upscale. Formerly a destination for backpackers and hostelgoers, it now affords interesting new lodging options. A new Explora hotel, from the legendary Chilean innovators, is set to open in 2010, just north of town, and a handful of other upscale lodges are also in the works.

El Puma El Puma is one of the originals in El Chaltén. The owners of this hotel work with the outfitter Fitz Roy Expediciones, which has an office next door. The hotel sits back from the main road and faces out toward snowy peaks, although without a view of FitzRoy. Inside, warm beige walls and wooden beams interplay with brick. Although the common areas have terra-cotta ceramic floors, all rooms are carpeted. Although rooms are bright, their style and their bathrooms are, frankly, outdated. The inn relies heavily on repeat bookings from foreign agencies. The cozy lounge has a few chairs that face a roaring fire. There's also an eating area with wooden tables and a small bar. Service here is relaxed and very friendly.

Lionel Terray 212, El Chaltén. ✆/fax **02962/493095.** w ww.hosteriaelpuma.com.ar. 12 units. $160 ([bp108) double; $200 (£135) double, including half-board. Rates include buffet breakfast and transfers from the bus stop. MC, V. Closed Apr–Oct. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lunch catering; bar; excursions; transfers; laundry services.

Hostería El Pilar ★ Seventeen kilometers (10 miles) from El Chaltén, Hostería El Pilar is isolated, but with lovely, peaceful surroundings. The yellow-walled and red-roofed El Pilar was once an *estancia;* now it's tastefully and artistically decorated with just enough detail to look great without distracting you from the outdoors. The lounge has a few couches and a fireplace, and it's a comfy spot in which to hang out and read a book. Rooms are simple but attractive, with peach walls, comfor table beds, and sunlight that streams through half-curtained windows. Superior rooms are all doubles and have bigger bathrooms. Transfers from El Chaltén are included. Guests normally take their meals at the hotel's restaurant, which serves great cuisine. The hotel offers guided excursions, and it's located next to several trail heads. If you're driving here, keep an eye open for the sign to this hotel, because it's easy to miss. It is open to the public as a teahouse.

Ruta Provincial 23, 17km (10 miles) from El Chaltén. ✆/fax **02962/493002.** www.hosteriaelpilar.com.ar. 10 units. $155 (£105) double. Rates include transfers from El Chaltén. No credit cards. Must reserve ahead Oct–Apr. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; lounge.

In-Land-Sis ★ (Value) A fresh, new spot in town that's run by two funky young mountain lovers, this is just a small step up from a *hostal* and particularly appealing to young couples on a budget. There are eight doubles, each with a private bathroom. Four have double beds, and four have bunk beds squished in. All have views of the peaks; room no. 6 has a great view of FitzRoy. It's clean and friendly. Discounts are given to those who pay in cash.

Lago del Desierto 480, El Chaltén. ✆ **02962/493276.** www.inlandsis.com.ar. 8 units. $70 (£47) double with queen-size bed; $55 (£37) double with bunk. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Small restaurant; laundry service.

Kaulem Hosteria ★ (Finds) If you are looking for peace and quiet, very personalized service, and comfortable rooms with a great view, this charming (albeit tiny) new B&B may be just right. Dark woods and natural colors fill up the two-story main room, where FitzRoy is on display. Rooms are simple, with more natural coloring, and are perhaps too simple for the price; the upstairs ones have superb views. With only four rooms, the staff really goes above and beyond to make you feel at home in this unique setting; they'll happily meet just about any request, from a sewing kit to a café latte.

Av. Antonio Rojo and Comandante Arrua, El Chaltén. ✆/fax **02962/493251.** www.kaulem.com.ar. 4 units. $165 (£111) double. Rates include breakfast and transfers from bus stop. MC, V. **Amenities:** Lounge.

Los Cerros Del Chaltén ★ Owners of the famous Los Notros Hotel have done their best to spiff things up in El Chaltén. The Los Cerros inn sits above everybody else physically, and is by far the most luxurious place in town. The common spaces have a new-cottage feel, with comfy sofas and tall ceilings. The rooms, on either side of green hallways, are large and open to fabulous views stretching above the village and across the valley. Bathrooms come in a variety of setups, all with modern fixtures and a jetted soaker tub. Top-floor premium rooms have sloped ceilings and an alpine chalet feel. There are no TVs or phones in the rooms; but there is a common living room with picture books and a large TV where you can watch movies. I found the service a bit too formal for a laid-back mountain village such as El Chaltén. Breakfasts are excellent, particularly the scrumptious baked goods. However, the all-inclusive nature of most packages keeps you from discovering the surprisingly fun and funky restaurants of El Chaltén. The downstairs spa is minimal but relaxing enough. Los Cerros will appeal to those looking for a Patagonian version of white-glove formality.

San Martín s/n, El Chaltén. ✆ **02962/493812.** www.loscerrosdelchalten.com. 44 units. $452–$561 (£305–£379) double; $836–$1,422 (£564–£960) 2-night all-inclusive per person double. All-inclusive packages include meals, transfers, and selected excursions. Room and half-board-only options are also available. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; small spa; excursions; gift shop; room service; laundry service; high-speed Internet; library; mini-cinema. *In room:* Hair dryer, safe, jetted tubs, no phone.

Senderos Hostería ★★ (Finds) A lovely little mountain lodge, this new inn has superb service, cozy rooms (the nicest ones have wooden ceilings), and great service. Built with traditional Patagonian architecture (tin and wood), rooms are bright and sunny. There's a gentle luxury that is just upscale enough for this informal town. Top-floor rooms are the quietest. The location, on the edge of town facing the new bus terminal, isn't the best, and landscaping is a problem. But inside, there is a lot of heart, warmth, and good vibes. Their restaurant is superb.

Perito Moreno s/n, El Chaltén. ✆ **02962/493336.** www.senderoshosteria.com.ar. 21 units. $132–$156 (£89–£105) double; $170–$210 (£115–£142) suite. Rates include breakfast and transfers from the bus stop. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Restaurant; wine bar; transfers; reading room; TV room w/DVD library.

WHERE TO DINE

For a casual town where everyone wears hiking boots, El Chaltén has surprisingly good dining options. Climbers gather during a stormy day at **Patagonicus,** Güemes at Andreas Madsen (✆ **02962/493025**). Patagonicus serves mostly pizza and enormous salads in a woodsy dining area with fair prices; no credit cards accepted. It's a good spot for an afternoon coffee. **Fuegia** ★, San Martín 342 (✆ **02962/493243**), has an eclectic, global menu including coconut chicken with cashews and excellent salads. There are also good vegetarian options. In a ramshackle old house loaded with character, **Ruca Mahuida** ★★, at Lionel Terray 55 (✆ **02962/493018**), has the feel of an old alpine hut. The food is pure Patagonian, with stews, trout, and hearty pastas to fill you up after a day on the trail. Diners gather around a handful of tables, making this a great spot to make new friends. Reservations are recommended. For a funky scene with cool music and creative food, head to **Estepa,** at the corner of Cerro Solo and Antonio Rojo (✆ **02962/493069**). The lamb in soft mint sauce, pizzas, and pumpkin sorrentinos are superb. The restaurant at the **Senderos Hostería** ★★ (see "Where to Stay," above) is also excellent, and often offers wine-tasting evenings with a visiting sommelier.

9 TORRES DEL PAINE NATIONAL PARK, CHILE ★★

113km (70 miles) N of Puerto Natales; 360km (223 miles) NW of Punta Arenas

Across the border from Argentina's Los Glaciares National Park is Chile's prized jewel—a national park so magnificent that few in the world can claim a rank in its class. Torres del Paine is a major tourist destination whose popularity has grown tenfold over the past 5 years. Granite peaks and towers soar from sea level to upward of 2,800m (9,184 ft.). Golden plains and the rolling steppes are home to llamalike guanacos and more than 100 species of colorful birds, such as parakeets, flamingos, and ostrichlike rheas. During the spring, Chilean firebush blooms a riotous red, and during the autumn, the park's beech trees change to crimson, sunflower, and orange. A fierce wind screams through this region during the spring and summer, yet flowers, such as the delicate porcelain orchids and lady-slippers, somehow weather the inhospitable terrain. Electric-blue icebergs cleave from Glacier Grey. Resident gauchos ride atop sheepskin saddles. Condors float effortlessly even on the windiest day. This park is not something you just visit; it is something you experience.

Although it sits next to the Andes, **Parque Nacional Torres del Paine** is a separate geologic formation created roughly 3 million years ago when bubbling magma began growing and pushing its way up, taking a thick sedimentary layer with it. Glaciation and severe climate weathered away the softer rock, leaving the spectacular Paine Massif, whose prominent features are the *Cuernos* (which means "horns") and the one-of-a-kind *Torres*—three salmon-colored, spherical granite towers. The black sedimentary rock is visible on the upper reaches of the elegant Cuernos, named for the two spires that rise from the outer sides of its amphitheater. *Paine* is the Tehuelche Indian word for "blue," and it brings to mind the varying shades found in the lakes that surround this massif—among them the milky, turquoise waters of Lagos Nordenskjold and Pehoé. Backing the Paine Massif are several glaciers that descend from the Southern Ice Field.

Torres del Paine was once a collection of *estancias* and small-time ranches; many were forced out with the creation of the park in 1959. The park has since grown to its present

size of 242,242 hectares (598,338 acres), and in 1978 was declared a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO for its singular beauty and ecology. This park used to be a backpacker's dream, for adventurous trekkers only. These days, more and more visitors are choosing shorter hikes and fancier lodges, and Torres del Paine is closer to becoming a destination on the beaten path. Hiking along the main trails in January or February, you may find yourself in a queue and stumble upon places to spend money at every corner. Still, it's a big place, with big skies and room for many. There are options for everyone, which is why the number of visitors to this park is growing by nearly 20,000 per year.

ESSENTIALS

When to Go & What to Bring

This is not the easiest of national parks to visit. The climate in the park can be abominable. Wind speeds can peak at 161kmph (100 mph), and it can rain and snow even in the middle of summer. It is not unusual for visitors to spend 5 days in the park and never see the Towers. On average, the windiest days happen between late October and mid-March, but the only predictable thing about the weather here is its unpredictability. Besides the very unpredictable weather, spring is a beautiful time for budding flowers and birds; during the fall, the beech forests turn colors, which can be especially striking on walks up to the Towers and to the glacier. The winter is surprisingly temperate, with relatively few snowstorms and no wind—but short days. You'll need to stay in a hotel during the winter, but you'll practically have the park to yourself. Summer is, ironically, the worst time to come, especially from late December to mid-February, when the wind blows at full fury and crowds descend upon the park. When the wind blows, it can make even a short walk a rather scary experience or just crazy making. But just try to go with it, rather than fight it, and revel in the excitement of the extreme environment that defines Patagonia.

I can't stress enough the importance of bringing the right gear, especially waterproof hiking boots (if you plan to do any trekking), weatherproof outerwear, and warm layers, even in the summer. The ozone problem is acute here, so you'll need sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat as well.

Visitor & Park Entrance Information

Your visit to Torres del Paine will require logistical planning, unless you've left it up to an all-inclusive tour or hotel (this option is increasingly popular and there are more choices available for all-inclusive trips). Begin your research at www.torresdelpaine.cl, an English-language overview of the park and its surroundings, including maps, activities information, events, photos, hotel overviews and links, and more. The park service **CONAF** has a relatively unhelpful Spanish-only website at www.conaf.cl. The park's administration and visitor center are at the southern end of the park (✆ **61/691931**). The park is open daily year-round from 8:30am to 10pm. The cost to enter is $30 (£20); during the winter, the cost is $10 (£6.80) for adults. It's a lot—"Paine" as the park is called, is most visited park and the country and thus the money-grabber for the entire Chilean National Park system.

Getting There & Away

Many travelers are unaware of the enormous amount of time it takes to get to Torres del Paine. From the Argentine side, semiregular buses run to the park, but most go first to the town of Puerto Natales, where you will need to spend the night before heading to the park. Remember that if you are planning to camp in Torres del Paine, you'll need to buy

most of your food in Puerto Natales, as there are very limited grocery options in the park, and you can not take fresh food across the border from Argentina. From the nearest Chilean airport in Punta Arenas, it's a 5-hour drive to the park. From Puerto Natales, the park is about an hour north by car.

BY BUS To get to Torres del Paine from Argentina by bus, your best bet is to take the regular bus to Puerto Natales, spend the night there, then head into the park the next morning. **Bus Sur Zaahj,** at the Bus Terminal (✆ **02902/491631**), runs this route on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, leaving El Calafate at 8am. **Cootra** (✆ **02902/491144**), departs El Calafate at 8:30am. Buy tickets at least the day before to ensure yourself a seat. **Cordillera del Sol,** whose office is at 25 de Mayo 43, in El Calafate (✆ **02902/492822;** www.cordilleradelsol.com), offers transfers from El Calafate to Torres del Paine directly.

From Puerto Natales, buses to Torres del Paine enter through the Laguna Amarga ranger station, stop at the Pehoé catamaran dock, and terminate at the park administration center. If you're going directly to the Torres trailhead at Hostería Las Torres, there are minivan transfers waiting at the Laguna Amarga station that charge about $8 (£5.40) one-way. The return times given below are when the bus leaves from the park administration center; the bus will pass through the Laguna Amarga station about 45 minutes later. Some buses will pick you up from your hotel, but it depends on the relationship your hotel has with the various bus companies, so ask at the hotel reception.

Trans Via Paine, Bulnes 516 (✆ 61/413672), leaves daily at 7:30am via Laguna Amarga. **Gomez,** Arturo Prat 234 (✆ 61/411971), also leaves at 7:30am, returning from the administration building at 1pm. **Buses JB,** Arturo Prat 258 (✆ 61/410242), departs also at 7:30am, returning at 1pm. The cost is around $15 (£10) one-way.

BY TOUR VAN From El Calafate, a handful of similar "Paine in a Day" tours includes one organized by **Chaltén Travel** (✆ **02902/492212** in El Calafate; www.chaltentravel.com) for $95 (£64). It's a long but unforgettable day. They will also pick you up or drop you off in the park. **Comapa** (✆ **61/414300;** www.comapa.com) has an 11-hour tour of Paine from Puerto Natales that includes a few short hikes and lunch at the Hostería Lago Grey.

BY CAR From El Calafate, the direct drive to Torres del Paine is 394km (224 miles). Head south on Ruta 11 to Ruta 40, past the small town of El Cerrito, to the border at Cerro Castillo, also known as Cancha Carrera. The border is open daily in summertime from 8am to 10pm. On the Chilean side of the border, head north on Ruta 9 at Cerro Castillo, 84km (52 miles) to the park's administration building, or right/south on Ruta 9, for 63km (39 miles) to Puerto Natales. Be sure to tell the rental car agency that you will be taking your car to Chile, which requires special permits. The drive is 342km (212 miles) long and takes approximately 5 hours.

CROSSING LAGO PEHOÉ BY CATAMARAN Day hikers to the Glacier Grey trail and backpackers taking the W or Circuit trails will need to cross Lake Pehoé at some point aboard a catamaran, about a 45-minute ride. The cost is $22 (£15) one-way or $36 (£24) round-trip. Buses from Puerto Natales are timed to drop off and pick up passengers in conjunction with the catamaran (Nov 15–Mar 15 leaving Pudeto at 9:30am, noon, and 6pm; and from Pehoé at 10am, 12:30, and 6:30pm; Oct 16–30 and Mar 16–30 from Pudeto at noon and 6pm, and Pehoé at 12:30 and 6pm; Oct 1–15 and Apr, from Pudeto at noon, from Pehoé at 12:30pm; closed May–Sept, but service may expand—check with CONAF). Hikers walking the entire round-trip Glacier Grey trail can do so

only on the 9:30am boat, returning at 6:30pm from mid-November to March 15. The boat fills up quickly, so try to be there early; it's first-come, first-served.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE IN TORRES DEL PAINE

Hotels & Hosterías

Explora Hotel Salto Chico ★★★ Moments Explora in Patagonia has garnered more fame than any other hotel in Chile, and deservedly so. It's a one-stop shop for an unforgettable experience in Patagonia. Few hotels in the world offer as stunning a view as does Explora, perched above the milky, turquoise waters of Lago Pehoé and facing the dramatic granite amphitheater of the Paine massif. It is terribly expensive, but worth the splurge if you can afford it. Explora's style is comfortable elegance, and its contemporary interiors belie the rather bland modernist exterior: softly curving blond-wood walls built entirely from native deciduous beech. A band of picture windows wraps around the full front of the building, and there are large windows in each room. The crisp guest rooms are accented with Spanish checkered linens, handsome slate-tiled bathrooms, and warming racks for drying gear. Explora recently expanded to include 20 new guest rooms, meaning it is easier now to get a reservation than before, but the hotel has, in the process, lost a bit of the intimacy it had with just 30 rooms.

Explora is all-inclusive, with prices that cover airport transfers, meals, open bar, and excursions; 4-day packages start every 4 days. Excursions range from easy half-day walks to strenuous full-day hikes. There are about 15 excursions to choose from, including horseback rides and photo safaris. In the morning, a fleet of vans whisks guests off to their destination and back again for lunch; guides carry picnic lunches for full-day hikes. The set menu is limited to two choices, generally a meat and vegetarian dish, and it must be said that the food quality has at times been uneven—never bad, but not as outstanding as one would expect from a hotel of this caliber. Americans make up a full 60% of the guests, who typically indulge in the open bar, make new friends, and leave thrilled. Note that the first-day arrival to the hotel is around 6pm, leaving time for a short hike to a lookout point only. And the last day isn't really a day at all, as guests leave after breakfast for the drive back to the airport.

In Santiago, Américo Vespucio Sur 80, 5th floor. ✆ **2/395-2533.** Fax 2/228-4655. www.explora.com. 50 units. Packages per person, double occupancy: 4 nights/3 days starting at $2,476 (£1,673); 8 nights/7 days starting at $4,400 (£2,973). Rates include all meals, transportation, excursions, gear, and guides. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; lounge; large indoor heated pool; outdoor Jacuzzi; sauna; shop; massage; laundry service; high-speed Internet. *In room:* Minibar.

Hostería Lago Grey This classic little white *hostería* is tucked within a beech forest, looking out onto the beach at Lago Grey and the astounding blue icebergs that drift to its shore. It's well on the other side of the park, but the view is better here than at the Hostería las Torres. The 20 rooms are spread out from a main common area, a thoroughly enjoyable place to relax, with a restaurant, outdoor deck, and lounge area. The price suggests more luxurious rooms, but the walls are a tad thin and have little decoration. Also, when the wind whips up this side of the park is colder. On the plus side, there are plenty of trails that branch out from here, including the stroll along the beach out to the Pingo Valley and the strenuous hike up to Mirador Ferrier. You can also arrange rafting trips down the Rio Grey and kayaking among the icebergs. The downside of this *hostería* is that a stay here includes nothing but a room and breakfast—you will end up coughing up much cash for overpriced meals, bar service, and transfers.

Office in Punta Arenas, Lautaro Navarro 1077. ✆ **61/712100.** www.turismolagogrey.com. 30 units. Oct–Apr $315 (£213) double; May–Sept $151 (£102) double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; tours.

Hostería Mirador del Payne ★ This *hostería* is part of an antique *estancia* just outside the park, and it boasts a commanding view of the Paine Massif rising behind a grassy field and Lake Verde. If you really want to get away from crowds, this is your hotel, although it doesn't put you directly near the park's trail heads. The rooms are in a unit separate from the main lodge, which has a restaurant, bar, and fireside lounge. The *hostería* offers horseback-riding opportunities that include a chance to corral cattle and assist with other ranch duties. Access to the *hostería* is via one of two ways: by a road that branches off before arriving at the park or by a moderate 2-hour trail that leads to the park administration center. Guests arrive by road, but more than a few opt to end their stay here with a horseback ride to the park administration center to continue onto another hotel within the park's boundaries.

Office in Punta Arenas, Fagnano 585. ✆ **61/228712.** www.miradordelpayne.com. 20 units. Nov–Mar 15 $245 (£166) double; Mar 16–Oct $200 (£135) double. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; lounge; tours; laundry service.

Hotel Las Torres Patagonia ★ Kids This used to be an original working cattle *estancia,* sitting at the trail head to the Torres. But due to recent expansion, it's now a full-blown hotel, with traffic to match. The complex now includes a low-slung, ranch-style hotel, a two-story hotel wing next door, a large campground, and a hostel. Their on-site stables, and access to the Towers is convenient; however, it is a long drive to the other side of the park. Las Torres recently inaugurated a small spa, with mud therapy, massage, and sauna. The buffet-style restaurant is above par, but pricey.

The hotel offers expensive packages that include guided tours, meals, and transportation, much like Explora, and excellent off-season trips to little-explored areas. Packages run from 3 to 7 nights, or you can pay separately for day trips. Try spending 2 nights here and 2 at Hostería Lago Grey, thereby avoiding the steep price of an excursion there. Rooms have no views.

Office in Punta Arenas, Sarmiento 846. ✆/fax **61/363636.** www.lastorres.com. 84 units. $267 (£180) single; $305 (£206) double; 4-night packages from $1,674 (£1,131) per person double. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; tour desk; room service; laundry service; horseback riding.

Patagonia Camp ★★ Kids Moments The most appealing new lodging option in the area is a camp for grown-ups. With a mountaineer's heart and a luxury bent, this is not a hotel, it's an experience in nature. Set on a slope above Lago del Toro, with stunning views of the Paine massif, its layout is similar to safari camps found in the African savanna. There are 18 wood-framed yurts (Mongolian-inspired wood-framed tents) situated along wooden walkways tucked a inside beech forest. Incredibly bright, cozy, and plush, the yurts have high-end touches, such as woven blankets, central heating, and copper shower heads. Each has a luxurious bathroom with a soaker tub. But it's not a walk in the park: If you have trouble sleeping, you may curse the tents that flap loudly in a strong storm. If the night's clear though, you'll have delightful stargazing from your bed. If it's raining, you'll get wet here just going from place to place. But the atmosphere is incredibly natural, secluded, and romantic. In the main lodge, meals (and pisco sours) are served. Their all-inclusive packages, again, mirror those of Explora, but Patagonia Camp is much more quiet and intimate.

Hernando de Aguirre 414, Santiago. ✆ **2/335-6898.** www.patagoniacamp.com. 18 units. 3-night programs $2,110 (£1,426) single, $1,410 (£953) double. Rates include all meals, excursions, transfers, and guides. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; library.

Refugios & Hostales

Four cabinlike lodging units, all with shared accommodations, distributed along the park's Circuit and W trails, are moderately priced sleeping options for backpackers who are not interested in pitching a tent. Although most have bedding or sleeping bags for an expensive rental price, your best bet is to bring your own. The price, at $40 (£27) on average per night (about $63/£43 for room and full board) for a simple dorm bed (or $80/£54 for full board), is not cheap; it's at least three times more than camping. All come with hot showers, a cafe, and a common area for hiding out from bad weather. Meals served here are simply prepared but hearty. Alternatively, guests can bring their own food and cook. Each *refugio* has rooms with two to six bunks, which you'll have to share with strangers when they're full. During the high season, consider booking weeks in advance; although many visitors have reported luck after calling just a few days beforehand (due to cancellations). All agencies in Puerto Natales and Punta Arenas book reservations and issue vouchers, but the best bet is to call or e-mail (see below).

The first three *refugios* are owned and operated by **FantásticoSur,** a division of the Hostería las Torres. They can be booked by contacting ✆/fax **61/360361** or by visiting www.wcircuit.com:

- **Refugio Torres:** This lodge is the largest and most full-service *refugio* in the park; it sits near the Hostería Las Torres and the trail head for the W-circuit and Full Circuit. You may dine in the hotel or eat simple fare in the *refugio* itself. Horseback rides can be taken from here.
- **Refugio El Chileno:** This is the least-frequented *refugio* because it is located halfway up to the Towers (most do the trail as a day hike). Hikers will find it more convenient to stow their stuff in the campground at the *hostería,* but, then again, this *refugio* puts you away from the hubbub below.
- **Refugio Los Cuernos:** This may be the park's loveliest *refugio,* located at the base of the Cuernos. The wood structure (which miraculously holds up to some of the strongest winds in the park) has two walls of windows that look out onto Lago Nordenskjold.

Tips Advance Planning

Due to the soaring popularity of Torres del Paine, it is recommended that travelers book well in advance, if they're planning to visit the park between late November and late March. Nearly every business now has a website or, at the very least, an e-mail address, so trip planning is easier than ever. Hotels can be booked directly, and often they offer their own transportation from the airport. At the very least, they can recommend a service to call or e-mail. One-stop local agencies such as **FantásticoSur,** Sarmiento 846, in Punta Arenas (✆ **61/613410;** www.fantasticosur.com), and **Chile Native,** Eberhard 230, in Puerto Natales (✆ **61/411835,** or toll-free from North America 800/649-8776; www.chilenativo.com), are good places for *refugio* reservations, horseback-riding trips, or camping equipment rentals; and they can sometimes offer lower hotel rates at *hosterías* in the park. They can also solve tricky transfer problems.

- **Paine Grande Mountain Lodge:** This *hostal*-like "lodge" replaces the old *refugio* Pehoé, at the busiest intersection in the park. It is the hub for several of the trail heads to the park administration center, Glacier Grey, and French Valley, as well as the docking site for the catamaran. Utilitarian in style, the *hostal* has 60 beds, two lounges, and a cafeteria that can serve 120 people. Day walks to Glacier Grey and French Valley can be taken from here. Call ✆ **61/412742;** or book online at contact@verticepatagonia.cl.

Camping in Torres del Paine

Torres del Paine has a well-designed campground system with free and concession-run sites. All *refugios* have a campground, too, and these and other concession sites charge about $15 (£10) per person, which includes hot showers, clean bathrooms, and an indoor dining area in which to escape bad weather and eat under a roof. The site at Las Torres provides barbecues and firewood. Free campgrounds are run by CONAF, and they can get a little dingy, with deplorable outhouses. Beginning in March, mice become a problem for campers, so always leave food well stored or hanging from a tree branch. The JLM hiking map (available at every bookstore, airport, kiosk, and travel agency, and at the park entrance) denotes which campgrounds are free and which charge a fee.

TRAILS IN TORRES DEL PAINE

Torres del Paine has something for everyone, from easy, well-trammeled trails to remote walks through relatively people-free wilderness. Which path you choose depends on how much time you have and what kind of walking you're up for. Pick up one of **JLM's Torres del Paine maps** (sold everywhere), or download a map from **www.torresdelpaine.com** to begin planning your itinerary. Walking times shown below are average.

Long-Haul Overnight Hikes

The Circuit The Circuit is a spectacular, long-haul backpacking trip that takes hikers around the entire Paine Massif. It can be done in two ways: with the W included or without. Including the W, you'll need 8 to 11 days; without it, from 4 to 7 days. The Circuit is less traveled than the W because it's longer and requires that you camp out at least twice. I don't recommend doing this trail if you have only 4 or 5 days. This trail is for serious backpackers only, because it involves several difficult hikes up and down steep, rough terrain and over fallen tree trunks. You'll be rewarded for your effort, however, with dazzling views of terrain that varies from grassy meadows and winding rivers to thick virgin beech forest, snowcapped peaks, and, best of all, the awe-inspiring view of Glacier Grey, seen from atop the John Garner Pass. If you're a recreational hiker with a 4- to 6-hour hike tolerance level, you'll want to sleep in all the major campgrounds or *refugios*. Always do this trail counterclockwise for easier ascents and with the scenery before you. If you're here during the high season and want to get away from crowds, you might contemplate walking the first portion of this trail, beginning at Laguna Azul. This is the old trail, and it more or less parallels the Circuit, but on the other side of the river, passing the gaucho post La Victorina, the only remaining building of an old *estancia*. At Refugio Dickson, you'll have to cross the river, in the *refugio*'s dinghy, for $4 (£2.70). To get to Laguna Azul, you'll need to hitchhike or arrange private transportation. Do not underestimate the isolation of most of this hike—snowstorms, injuries, having minimal food, a lot can go wrong on this trek so please be fully prepared.

Approx. 60km (37 miles) total. 7–10 days. Beginning at Laguna Amarga or Hostería Las Torres. Terrain ranges from easy to difficult.

The W This segment of the Paine Massif is so called because hikers are taken along a trail that forms a W. This trail leads to the park's major geological features—the Torres, the Cuernos, and Glacier Grey—and it's the preferred multiday hike for its relatively short hauls and a time frame that requires 4 to 5 days. In addition, those who prefer not to camp or carry more gear than a sleeping bag, food, and their personal goods can stay in the various *refugios* along the way. Most hikers begin at Hostería Las Torres and start with a day-walk up to the Torres. From here, hikers head to the Los Cuernos *refugio* and spend the night, or continue on to the Italiano campsite near the base of the valley; then they walk up to French Valley. The next stop is Pehoé *refugio,* where most spend the night before hiking up to Glacier Grey. It's best to spend a night at Refugio Grey and return to the Pehoé *refugio* the next day. From here, take the catamaran across Lago Pehoé to an awaiting bus back to Puerto Natales.

4–5 days. Approx. 56km (35 miles) total. Beginning at Hostería Las Torres or Refugio Pehoé. Terrain ranges from easy to difficult.

Day Hikes

These hikes run from easy to difficult, either within the W or from various trail heads throughout the park. Again, the times given are estimates for the average walker.

Glacier Grey Hike here for an up-close look at the face of Glacier Grey, though warm summers of late have sent the glacier retreating. There aren't as many steep climbs as the trail to Las Torres, but it takes longer to get there (about 3 1/2 hr.). I recommend that hikers in the summer walk this lovely trail to the glacier lookout point, and then take the boat back to Hostería Grey. The walk takes hikers through thick forest and stunning views of the Southern Ice Field and the icebergs slowly making their way down Lago Grey. A turnoff just before the lookout point takes you to Refugio Grey.

3 1/2 hr. one-way. 11km. Difficult.

Lago Grey Moments Not only is this the easiest walk in the park, but it is one of the most dramatic for the gigantic blue icebergs that rest along the shore of Lago Grey. A flat walk across the sandy shore of the lake takes visitors to a peninsula for a short hike to a lookout point with Glacier Grey in the far distance. This walk begins near the Hostería Lago Grey; they also offer a recommended boat ride that weaves past icebergs and then takes passengers to the face of the glacier.

Departing from the parking lot past the entrance to Hostería Lago Grey. 1–2 hr. one-way. 2km. Easy.

Lago Pingo Finds Lago Pingo consistently sees fewer hikers, and it's an excellent spot for bird-watching for the variety of species that flock to this part of the park. The trail begins as an easy walk through a pleasant valley, past an old gaucho post. From here the trail heads through forest and undulating terrain, and past the Pingo Cascade until it eventually reaches another old gaucho post, the run-down but picturesque Zapata *refugio.* You can make this trail as long or as short as you'd like; the return is back along the same trail. The trail leaves from the same parking lot as the Lago Grey trail.

Departing from the Lago Grey parking lot past the entrance to Hostería Lago Grey. 1–4 hr. one-way. 11km, 8km to Pingo River. Easy to moderate.

Las Torres (The Towers) The trail to view the soaring granite Towers is a classic hike in the park but certainly not the easiest. Those who are in decent shape will not want to miss this exhilarating trek. The trail leaves from the Hostería Las Torres and begins with a steep 45-minute ascent, followed by up-and-down terrain for 1 1/2 hours to another 45-minute steep ascent up a slippery granite moraine. Midway is the Refugio Chileno,

where you can stop for a coffee or spend the night. Don't give up—the Torres do not come into full view until the very end.

3 hr. one-way. Difficult.

Mirador Nordenskjold The trail head for this walk begins near the Pudeto catamaran dock. This trail begins with an up-close visit to the crashing Salto Grande waterfall. Then it winds through Antarctic beech and thorny bush to a lookout point with dramatic views into the French Valley and the Cuernos, looking over Lago Nordenskjold. This trail is a good place to see wildflowers in the spring.

1 hr. one-way. 5km. Easy.

Valle Francés (French Valley) There are several ways to hike this trail. From Refugio Pehoé, you'll pass by the blue waters of Lake Skottsberg and through groves of Chilean firebush and open views of the granite spires behind Los Cuernos. From Refugio Los Cuernos, you won't see French Valley until you're in it. A short walk through the campground leads hikers to direct views of the hanging glacier that descends from Paine Grande, and enthusiastic hikers can continue the steep climb up into the valley itself for a view of French Valley's enormous granite amphitheater.

Departing from Refugio Pehoé or Refugio Los Cuernos. 2½–4½ hr. one-way. 8km. Moderate to difficult.

OTHER OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES IN THE PARK

Horseback Riding

A horseback ride in Torres del Paine can be one of the most enjoyable ways to see the park. Both Hotel Las Torres and Explora have their own stables, but only the hotel has daily horseback rides, even to the Refugios Chileno and Los Cuernos; its Punta Arenas office is at Magallanes 960 (✆/fax **61/226054**). The full-day trips cost $125 (£84) per person, and they leave from the hotel. For longer, multiday horseback-riding trips, contact **Chile Nativo Expeditions,** Eberhart 230 (✆ **61/411835;** www.chilenativo.com). Chile Nativo can plan custom-made journeys within the park and to little-known areas, some of which include an introduction to the gaucho and *estancia* way of life. Most trips require prior experience.

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Tierra del Fuego & Antarctica

by Christie Pashby

This is the end of the world. It's a place cut off from everywhere else, facing south toward the stormy waters of the Drake Passage, Cape Horn, and ultimately, Antarctica. It's a magical and alluring location that continues to draw tourists. Four hundred years have passed since Ferdinand Magellan cast his eyes on the dark headlands, silver shores, and craggy peaks of Tierra del Fuego. As he sailed past, flames blazed in the darkness along the coastline—bonfires lit by the Yamanas tribe—inspiring him to name the place "Land of Fire." Since then, this wind-swept island, washed by the Magellan straits to the north and Beagle Channel to the south, has witnessed a rich parade of shipwrecks, penal colonies, gold prospectors, and missionaries. The Yamanas have disappeared, but Chile and Argentina have repopulated the area, while conducting a bad-tempered tug of war over its icy inlets and penguin-populated rocks. This wild, romantic island is now divided in two: Argentina controls the lower eastern coast, and the rest belongs to Chile.

Vast sheep *estancias* (ranch farms) to the north cover a rolling tundra of brown furze and isolated farmhouses. Here the wide, meandering Río Grande holds the biggest sea brown trout in the world, making it a mecca for fly fishers. Farther south, the land rises into forests of beech trees and wind-chopped lakes. The snow-flecked summits of the Andes give way to the bustling pioneer town of Ushuaia. Here you'll find an eclectic mix of resettled Argentines and silver-haired European and American baby boomers stopping off on cruises bound for Antarctica.

They also come for rich coastal wildlife, stunning views, the best seafood in Argentina, and off-season skiing beneath hanging glaciers.

Just when you think you can go no farther, you remember that another continent lies farther south. If you're lucky enough to have Antarctica as your final destination, it's from Ushuaia that you get there.

1 USHUAIA

461km (286 miles) SW of Punta Arenas; 594km (368 miles) S of Río Gallegos

Pinned snugly in a U-shaped cove facing the Beagle Channel, Ushuaia is a substantial metropolis of 70,000 people. Colorful clapboard houses with rickety staircases and corrugated roofs at impossible angles are punctuated by the occasional bland block of brick or concrete. All rise steeply into a backdrop of beech trees and spirelike mountain summits. Not only is it the most southerly city in the world (Chile's Puerto Williams is actually farther south, but hardly qualifies as a city), but it also has the distinction of

being the only Argentine city on the other side of the Andes. At its tail end, the mountain range is dragged eastward by restless tectonic plates that rattle frequently. To reach Ushuaia by car, you must cross briefly through Chile and then cross the Andes. What you find is a frontier town with lots of character, a rich outdoor life, and a surprisingly cosmopolitan feel. One hundred years ago, the only people crazy enough to live here were convicts in chains. Indeed, the city owes its existence to the prison: Inmates built the town railway, hospital, and port. Now it attracts Argentines from all over the country, who come for tax breaks and plentiful jobs. Visitors find lots to do—whether it's visiting that same prison, which is now a fascinating museum, or exploring the many attractions of the Beagle Channel. Local residents are welcoming and friendly, with a refreshing hardiness and eccentricity that likely come from living at the end of the world.

ESSENTIALS

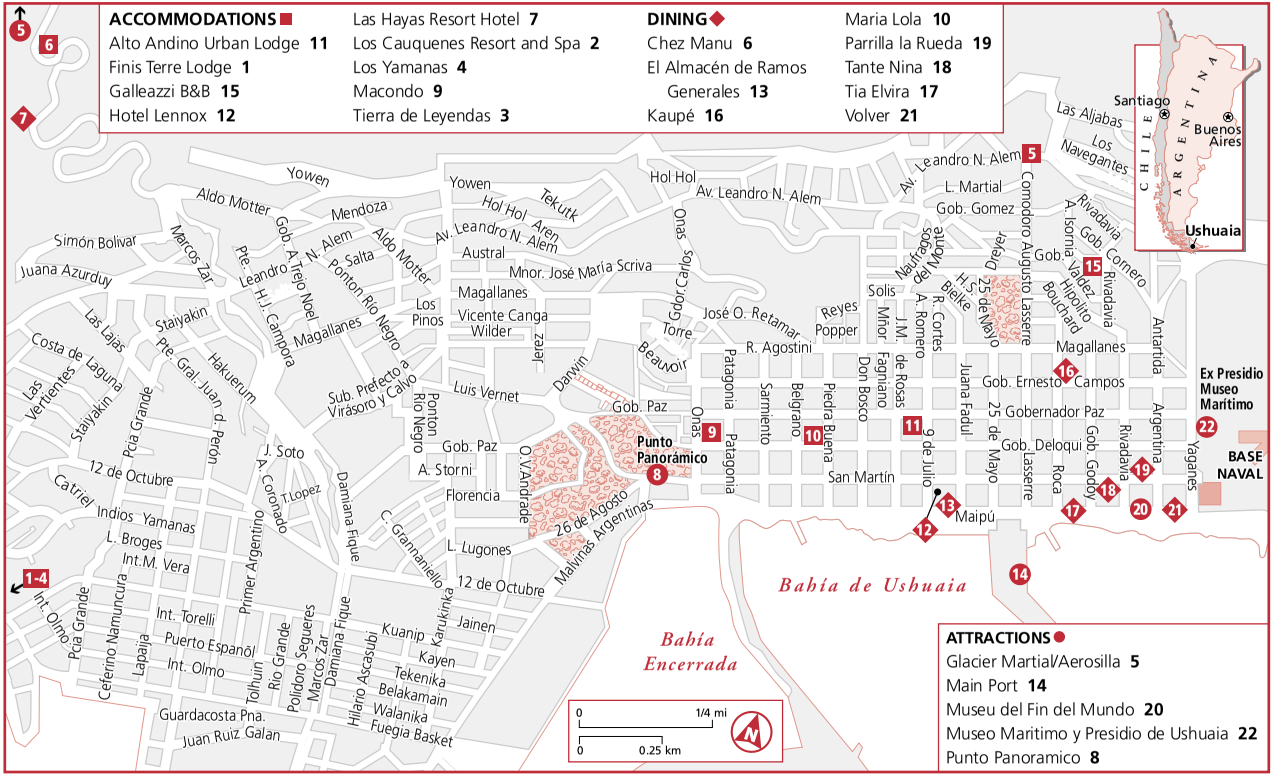
Getting There

BY PLANE The **International Airport Malvinas Argentinas** is 5km (3 miles) from the city (✆ **2901/431232**). There is no bus service to town, but cab fares are only about $7 (£4.75). Always ask for a quote before accepting a ride. **Aerolíneas Argentinas** (✆ **0800/222-86527** or 2901/437265; www.aerolineas.com.ar) operates four or five daily flights to Buenos Aires, one of which leaves from Ezeiza and stops in El Calafate. Average round-trip fare is $500 (£337). Frequency increases from November to March, when there's also a daily flight from Río Gallegos and twice-weekly flights from Trelew. **LAN** (✆ **0810/999-9526** or 2901/424244) flies from Buenos Aires daily via El Calafate. They also fly from Santiago de Chile via Punta Arenas on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. **Aerovías DAP,** Deloqui 575 (✆ **2901/431110;** www.aeroviasdap.cl), runs charter flights from Punta Arenas and over Cape Horn. It costs around $3,000 (£2,023) for a group of seven people (round-trip), leaving whenever you want.

BY BUS There is no bus station in the city. Buses usually stop at the port (Maipú and Fadul). The service from Punta Arenas, Chile, costs $30 to $40 (£20–£27) and takes

Cruising from Punta Arenas to Ushuaia

Crucero Australis operates an unforgettable journey between Punta Arenas and Ushuaia aboard its ships, the M/V *Mare Australis* and the M/V *Via Australis*. This cruise takes passengers to remote coves and narrow channels and fiords in Tierra del Fuego, and then heads into the Beagle Channel, stopping in Puerto Williams on Isla Navarino and later Ushuaia, Argentina. There's also a stop at the absolute end of the world, Cape Horn, although the chances that you will be able to get off the boat and touch *tierra firma* there aren't likely, due to notorious winds. The trip can be done as a 4-night one-way from Punta Arenas or a 3-night one-way journey from Ushuaia. I recommend that you take just the one-way journey, ideally departing Punta Arenas, leaving you to explore a new city and then travel by air or land from there.


ACCOMMODATIONS
Alto Andino Urban Lodge 11
Finis Terre Lodge 1
Galleazzi B&B 15
Hotel Lennox 12
Las Hayas Resort Hotel 7
Los Cauquenes Resort and Spa 2
Los Yamanas 4
Macondo 9
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about 12 hours. **Tecni Austral** (✆ **2901/431408** in Ushuaia, or 61/613423 in Punta Arenas) leaves Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays at 5:30am; tickets are sold in Ushuaia from the Tolkar office, at Roca 157, and in Punta Arenas, at Lautaro Navarro 975. **Pacheco,** San Martín 1267 (✆ **2901/437727;** www.busespacheco.com), has trips to Punta Arenas via Río Grande, leaving on Monday, Thursday, and Sunday at 9am; it costs $54 (£36). To go to Río Grande, try **Lider LTD, Transporte Montiel,** or **Tecni Austral.** They offer eight daily departures, and the $18 (£12) trip takes around 4 hours.

BY BOAT The company **Crucero Australis** operates a cruise to Ushuaia from Punta Arenas and vice versa, aboard its ships the M/V *Mare Australis* and M/V *Via Australis;* departures are Saturday from Punta Arenas and Wednesday from Ushuaia, from late September to April. See "Cruising from Punta Arenas to Ushuaia," below.

What is unique about this cruise is the intimacy of a smaller ship and its solitary route that takes passengers to places in Tierra del Fuego that few have a chance to see. Passengers are shuttled to shore via zodiacs (motorized inflatable boats) for two daily excursions that can include visits to glaciers or a sea elephant rookery, walks to view elaborate beaver dams, or horseback rides. There are several excellent bilingual guides who give daily talks about the region's flora, fauna, history, and geology. Service is stiff but professional, and the food is quite good. The accommodations are comfortable, ranging from suites to simple cabins. All-inclusive, per-person prices (excluding cocktails) range from $1,930 to $4,390 (£1,301–£2,960) one-way from Punta Arenas and $1,440 to $3,290 (£971–£2,220) one-way from Ushuaia. It's not really worth it to pay extra for an upper deck; second-floor berths are the most stable, quiet, and comfortable. This cruise operates from early October to late April. For reservations or information, contact their U.S. offices in Miami at 4014 Chase Ave., Ste. 215 (✆ **877/678-3772**).

Getting Around

BY CAR Everything in and around Ushuaia is easily accessible via bus, taxi, or an inexpensive shuttle or tour service. Ushuaia's taxi drivers must be the nation's friendliest, and they're fonts of information concerning the region. The multitude of excursion options obviates the need for a car, though if you are staying at a hotel outside downtown, a car will certainly free you up for dining and exploring options. **Hertz,** San Martín 245, has an office in town right next to the Crucero Australis office and another at the airport (✆ **2901/437529;** www.hertz.com). **Avis,** Godoy 46, drops its prices for multiday rentals (✆ **2901/436665;** www.avis.com); **Cardos Rent A Car** is at Av. San Martín 845 (✆ **2901/436388**). Rates start at $75 (£51) a day in high season. Most of them rent 4×4 jeeps with unlimited mileage. If you wish to cross into Chile at San Sebastian, you will need a special-permission document costing $50 (£34).

Visitor Information

The **Subsecretaría de Turismo** has two very helpful and well-stocked offices on San Martín 674 (✆ **2901/432001;** fax 2901/434550) and another on the tourism Pier, Maipú 505 (✆ **2901/437666;** fax 2901/430694; www.e-ushuaia.com). They also have a counter at the airport. The offices are open Monday through Friday from 8am to 10pm, Saturdays and Sundays from 9am to 8pm. The national park administration office is on Av. San Martín 1395 (✆ **2901/421315;** Mon–Fri 9am–3pm).

Fast Facts Ushuaia

Currency Exchange **Thaler,** Av. San Martín 788 (✆ **2901/421911**), is an old-fashioned currency exchange house. **Banco Patagonia,** Avenida San Martín and Godoy (✆ **2901/432080**), and **Banco Nación,** Av. San Martín 190 (✆ **2901/422896**); both exchange currency and have 24-hour ATMs.

Laundry **Los Tres Angeles,** Rosas 139, is open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 8pm.

Pharmacy **Andina,** Av. San Martín 638 (✆ **2901/423431**).

Post Office **Correo Argentino** is at Avenida San Martín and Godoy (✆ **2901/421347**), open Monday through Friday from 9am to 7pm, Saturday from 9am to 1pm; the private postal company **OCA** is at Maipú and Avenida 9 de Julio (✆ **2901/424729**), open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 6pm.

Travel Agency & Credit Cards **American Express** travel and credit card services are provided by **All Patagonia,** Juana Fadul 60 (✆ **2901/433622**).

WHERE TO STAY

It seems that anyone with a large house in Ushuaia is offering rooms, and the plethora of hotels, B&Bs, and cabins can be bewildering. Nevertheless, accommodations are not cheap, and price is often not indicative of quality. It's best to shop around before committing to lodgings. There is also a new **Sheraton Hotel** being built on the hillside, as well as a handful of other important new hotel investments planned (but as of press time still under wraps).

Very Expensive

Finisterris Lodge Moments What could be more luxurious than your own private mountain cabin complete with a private spa, a private chef at hand, private transfers and a personal concierge ready to indulge all your needs? And then there's the privileged view, looking across at the Beagle Channel and down at the poor souls beneath you unable to afford this kind of opulence. Finisterris consists of four über-deluxe wooden cabins, each with giant windows, fireplaces, beautiful kitchens, lavish bedrooms, double Jacuzzis, and built-in saunas. It's hard to categorize a place this unique; the staff takes personalized service to unheard-of levels. It could make you feel coddled and spoiled. It could also leave you utterly relaxed. This is a decadent and romantic place, where privacy is a top priority. It's not ideal for children.

Monte Susana Ladera Este, Ushuaia. ✆ **2901/15-616125** (cell), or 11/5917-8288 in Buenos Aires. www.finisterrislodge.com. 4 units. $490 (£331) double. Rates include all transfers, use of cellphone. MC, V. **Amenities:** Wine cellar; shopping; massage; excursions; private chef. *In room:* TV/DVD player (DVDs available), kitchen, safe, PlayStation, sauna, Jacuzzi.

Las Hayas Resort Hotel ★ For years, this was the top hotel in Ushuaia, on the road to Glacier Martial. It has traditionally welcomed all VIPs and major events and has appealed to those looking for old-world elegance. Times have changed, and the market is much more competitive. Las Hayas needs to up the ante to stay at the top. A major

plus is the location, which yields sweeping views of the town and the Beagle Channel. It's at least 3km (1 3/4 miles) from downtown, however, so you'll need to take a cab, hike, or use one of the hotel's summer-only transfer shuttles. The sumptuous lounge stretches the length of the building; here you'll find a clubby bar, formal restaurant, and fireside sitting area. The rooms are decorated with rich tapestries, upholstered walls, and big and bright bathrooms. A glass-enclosed walkway leads to an outstanding spa, swimming pool, and an indoor squash court; the hotel also offers automatic membership at the local golf club The owner of Las Hayas promotes an air of genteel exclusivity, making the hotel less than entirely suitable for children. Luis Martial, the gourmet restaurant on-site, changes its menu weekly but specializes in black hake and king crab dishes. Breakfasts are standard, and the public space could use a freshening up. Still, rooms are large and bright, if not modern and deluxe.

Av. Luis Fernando Martial 1650, Ushuaia. ✆ **2901/430710.** Fax 2901/430719. www.lashayas.com.ar. 102 units. $315 (£213) double; $421–$632 (£284–£426) suites. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; lounge; indoor swimming pool; access to nearby golf club; squash court; exercise room; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; room service; massage; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, hair dryer, safe.

Expensive

Hotel Lennox The hippest lodging in town, this hotel exudes style and modernity. In the lobby, floor lighting illuminates tall, mirrored walls, punctuated by dark-rock tiles and light-wood paneling. Modish sofas, in moody tones of black and gray, look out onto busy Avenida San Martín. On the third floor, a comfortable and spacious communal room houses more sofas and a widescreen TV. The dining room has elegant, urbane furnishings in red and brown. Here you can enjoy a continental breakfast while taking in fantastic views of the bay. Rooms are small but adequate, and some of the sparkling bathrooms have a Jacuzzi. Be sure to ask for a room at the back facing the bay. The street side can be noisy, and the inward facing rooms (facing a tiny, somewhat overstated "Zen garden") can lack privacy. In general, staff members are very friendly, and the hotel's contemporary feel is very refreshing and reassuring. Still, they've tripled the price over the past few years, and service hasn't improved accordingly.

San Martín 776, Ushuaia. ✆/fax **2901/436430.** www.lennoxhotel.com.ar. 30 units. $228 (£154) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; business center; room service; laundry service; Wi-Fi. *In room:* Safe, Jacuzzi.

Hotel Los Yámanas Inspired by the lifestyle of the Yamana people who used to rule this fine land, you may be inspired to hop aboard a replicated native canoe in the hotel's front garden. The Beagle Channel, after all, is right in front of you (if canoeing's not your thing, the hotel also owns the company that runs catamaran cruises on the channel). Inside, the decor is rustic, with plenty of mustard yellows and exposed rafters. All rooms have lovely channel views. Service is friendly, kind, and professional, if a bit slow. Walls are thin. There is a new spa and gym being completed out back amid a lovely forest.

Costa de Los Yamanas 2850, Ushuaia. ✆ **2901/445960.** www.hotelyamanas.com.ar. 49 rooms. $275 (£186) double; $400 (£270) suite. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; gym; game room; Wi-Fi. *In room:* Satellite TV, minibar, safe.

Los Cauquenes Resort & Spa ★★ Kids Ushuaia's newest luxury hotel has an outstanding location, perched right on the Beagle Channel and meters from the beach. The red-roofed, beechwood, and stone-walled main building looks like a mountain lodge. The lobby has massive windows, comfortable, oversize wool and leather furniture,

and a giant fireplace. For a hotel with only 54 rooms, there are a lot of amenities here, including the area's top spa and an acclaimed restaurant. Opt for one of the superior rooms, which are large and have bright windows overlooking the channel—standards often have little or no views. Suites have wooden terraces. All have modern bathrooms with marble and stainless steel fixtures, lush robes and towels, and flatscreen TVs. The staff tries hard to exceed your expectations. There are 10 daily transfers into town, although after a busy day exploring the area, you won't want to go anywhere. Six cabins work well for families on extended stays.

Calle Reinamora 3462, Ushuaia. ✆ **2901/441300,** or 11/4735-2648 in Buenos Aires. www.loscauquenes.com. 60 units. $294–$331 (£198–£223) double; $553 (£373) junior suite with ocean view. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; wine bar; indoor/outdoor pool; gym; spa; business center; conference rooms; babysitting service; laundry service; Wi-Fi. *In room:* Satellite TV, minibar, safe.

Tierra de Leyendas ★★ Maia Muriel and Sebastian Garcia Cosoleto met while working at the Marriott in Buenos Aires. They married and traveled the world before opening Tierra de Leyendas in Ushuaia, a hotel that caters to hedonists, foodies, and coastal walkers. Sebastian's experience as a trained chef and Maia's background in the hotel business go to good use here. You can immediately understand how their delightful establishment quickly gained a reputation as one of the best boutique hotels in Argentina, if not South America. The entire bottom floor is open plan, comprising a lounge room, restaurant, and reception with huge windows overlooking the bay. A rust-colored sofa contrasts nicely with olive walls and corn-yellow staircase. The attention to detail is incredible; they comb the sheepskin seat covers every day, and deliver with breakfast every morning a little note explaining a local anecdote (this is what the legends in the hotel's name refers to). The dining room tables are mini-museum exhibits, with indigenous arrowheads and flints beneath the glass dining surface. The five rooms are all named after a local fable. Ask for the Los Yamanas room, with its stunning view and incredibly relaxing, giant hot tub. The small restaurant is open to the public Monday to Saturday, so if you do decide to lodge elsewhere, at least book a table here to experience Sebastian's excellent cooking. Like others here (Las Yamanas, Los Cauquenes) the hotel is on the outskirts of town. It's a $4 (£2.70) taxi ride into town.

Calle Sin Nombre 2387, Ushuaia. ✆ **2901/443565.** www.tierradeleyendas.com.ar. 5 units. $195 (£132) double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; room service; DVD library; Wi-Fi. *In room:* TV/DVD player, Jacuzzi.

Moderate

Alto Andino Urban Lodge Finds Probably the best value in all of Ushuaia can be found at this new apart-hotel. Get in while it's still new! Funky modern art welcomes you in the lobby. Then head up the escalator to one of the 10 standard double rooms. For just a bit more, you can get a suite, which comes with a sofa bed and kitchenette. All decor is done in shades of rusted red and chocolate brown. Be sure to ask for a third-floor room for views. Breakfast is served in a sunny, bright space on the top floor. Out back is a new backpackers' hostel called "Freestyle."

Gobernador Pax 868, Ushuaia. ✆ **2901/430920.** www.altoandinohotel.com. 18 units. $100 (£68) double; $120 (£81) suite; $140 (£95) apt for 4. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; Wi-Fi. *In room:* Minibar, safe.

Macondo This stylish, green-roofed boutique hotel has a young, bohemian feel, without sacrificing elegance. Wall-to-wall Georgian windows surround the common room, with a black stone floor and colorful, cubed armchairs. The spacious, loftlike bedrooms have red roof beams and rafters. Bathrooms are fair-size, with shower

enclosures and wooden platforms. Stairs are in the style of a fire escape, leading you down to a second denlike common room with more couches and mattresses. Simple, modern, and attractive, this hotel also boasts a good central location with a great view.

Gobernador Paz 1410, Ushuaia. ✆/fax **2901/437576.** www.macondohouse.com. 7 units. $115 (£78) double. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Room service; laundry service; free Internet and Wi-Fi; TV room.

Inexpensive

Galeazzi–Basily B&B (Value) Sixteen years ago, Frances Basily's hospitality so overwhelmed an American houseguest that he raved she should start a bed-and-breakfast. Twenty minutes after he had left, Frances received a knock on the door, and it was two strangers inquiring about a room, recommended by the insistent American. "They had prices and everything! What could I do?" she asks. Since then, Frances and her husband Alejandro have been receiving a steady stream of guests, some lodging in the family home and others in some well-appointed cabins out back known as the "Aves del Sur" cabins. The house itself is tall, with a picket fence out front guarding a small forest of beech trees. A wooden walkway leads you into a comfortable, if somewhat worn, suburban home of white walls, plants, family photos, and a long dining room table. The house rooms are small and basic and a little gloomy. They offer two single beds and a shared bathroom. The cabins are much more spacious with lots more light. Yet you do not come here for simple luxury—what you get instead is a much more elusive sense of welcome and belonging. Everyone in the family speaks perfect English, and they're all very engaging and helpful. The kitchen is accessible, as is the living room sofa and TV, and Internet is free.

Gob. Valdez 323, Ushuaia. ✆ **2901/423213.** www.avesdelsur.com.ar. 5 shared units. $55 (£37) double; $95 (£64) cabin for up to 4. No credit cards. **Amenities:** Lounge/TV room; bike rental; free Internet; use of kitchen.

WHERE TO DINE

Here, king crab rules, and you'll find it on all menus, along with other excellent seafood dishes, such as sea bass and mussels. In general, dining out is much pricier here compared to the rest of the country. A dozen cafes are on San Martín, between Godoy and Rosas, all of which offer sandwiches and quick meals. The most popular among them is **Tante Sara,** San Martín 137 (✆ **2901/435005**), where a two-course meal of salad and ravioli or gnocchi costs $8 (£5.40). A block away, the Tante Sara Café is the place to sip coffee with locals in the afternoon. A few of the hotels in the area also have fine restaurants, including **Los Cauquenes** (✆ **2901/441300**) and **Tierra de Leyendas,** Calle Sin Nombre 2387, Ushuaia (✆ **2901/443565;** p. 405). It is wise to book ahead.

Chez Manu (Finds) SEAFOOD/FRENCH The Chez Manu offers great food and even better views, seen through a generous supply of windows. A French expat, Manu, runs the place. True to his roots, he has crafted a French-style menu based on fresh local ingredients. Dishes include black hake cooked with anise and herbs, or Fuegian lamb. Before taking your order, ask your server to describe the catch of the day, usually a cold-water fish from the bay, such as abadejo or merluza from Chile. Side dishes include a delicious eggplant ratatouille, made with extra-virgin olive oil and herbes de Provence. Service is so-so and the decor could use an update.The wine list includes several excellent regional dry whites.

Av. Luis Fernando Martial 2135. ✆ **2970/432253.** www.chezmanu.com. Main courses $14–$26 (£9.45–£18). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–2pm and 8–11:30pm.

Kaupé Restaurant ★★ ARGENTINE FINE DINING This has long been considered one of the best restaurants in Ushuaia, having built an award-winning reputation on its superb cuisine and lovely view. Lately, portions have become smaller and prices bigger. The menu is brief, but the offerings are delicious. Don't start your meal without ordering a sumptuous appetizer of king crab wrapped in a crepe and bathed in saffron sauce. Main courses include seafood, beef, and chicken; sample items include tenderloin beef in a plum sauce or a subtly flavored sea bass steamed in parchment paper. The extensive gourmet wine list ranges in price from $14 to $58 (£9.45–£39); there's also wine by the glass. Finish it all off with a sorbet in a frothy champagne sauce. Kaupé's dining area is cozy, and candlelit tables exude romance.

Roca 470. ✆ **2901/422704.** Reservations recommended on weekends. www.kaupe.com.ar. Main courses $14–$27 (£9.45–£18). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 8:30–11pm.

Maria Lola Restó ★ Kids ARGENTINE This laid-back, relaxing restaurant is situated on a hill, 4 blocks from main street San Martín. In a modern house with large windows, it overlooks the bay, with the town's clapboard church in the foreground. The dining area is large and spacious, and the decor is modern if a little bare. The clientele are a healthy mix of locals and visitors. There's a kids' menu, so families come for the early sitting (before 9pm). All come for a seafood menu, which includes the ubiquitous king crab, homemade pasta, and enormous desserts of cream and fresh fruit. There's a new wine list and sommelier. Maria Lola may not leave you speechless gastronomically, but it makes for very pleasant evening dining. Its charm lies in its understatement.

Deloqui 1048. ✆ **2901/421185.** www.marialolaresto.com.ar. Reservations recommended. Main courses $7–$16 (£4.75–£11). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3pm and 7pm–midnight.

Parrilla la Rueda ★ PARRILLA There is a long line of *parrillas* along the far east end of the main drag, San Martín. All offer "all you can eat" buffet-style service. The best of the bunch by far is La Rueda. Lamb, beef, and chicken are all slow-roasted on the grill, then offered table by table. There's also a large salad bar and friendly, unpretentious service from people who honestly care that you enjoy your meal. Eat as much as you can for $18 (£9.90), with a dessert like homemade *flan* included.

San Martín 193. ✆ **2901/436540.** Main courses $15–$21 (£10–£14). MC, V. Daily noon–11pm.

Ramos General ★★ COFFEEHOUSE/DELI This recently renovated, 103-year-old general store has a relaxing appeal and huge personality. It's been lovingly and passionately restored; there are pieces of Ushuaia's amazing heritage all around. Family portraits of the original owners hang in a side room, and a piano sits in the corner, along with old-fashioned typewriters. Situated in front of the port, the restaurant's menu offers cheese platters and generous king crab salads. They have outstanding breads and sweet treats by the fantastic French baker. Recommended are the panini, fisherman's salad, and the superb cheese boards. It makes for the perfect midmorning coffee stop or last stop on land before boarding a cruise. The wine list is excellent and includes a deservedly pricey Cheval des Andes. In keeping with its old-world vibe, the coffeehouse also serves as a bakery, a chic ladies fashion store, and bar with draft beer.

Maipú 749. ✆ **2901/424317.** www.ramosgeneralesushuaia.com. Main courses $7–$19 (£4.75–£13). AE, MC, V. Daily 9:30am–12:30am.

Tante Nina Finds SEAFOOD/ARGENTINE Tante Nina can't help but appeal to tourists. It has great views, a great location, and a friendly atmosphere. The dining room has huge picture windows overlooking the bay, handsome wooden chairs, and white

tablecloths. Specialties are the seafood casseroles (known as *cazuelas*), most of which come with fresh king crab (all for $16/£11). There's a delicious Hungarian-style *cazuela* with king crab, tomatoes, cream, and mushrooms; a long list of fish prepared many different ways; and, of course, grilled chicken, tenderloin, and the very interesting pickled Patagonian rabbit, for the adventurous. For dessert, try the homemade almond ice cream or luscious lemon sorbet. Service is refined, if slightly aloof, and the diners tend to be on the older side.

Gobernador Godoy 15. ✆ **2901/432444.** Reservations recommended for dinner in high season. Main courses $12–$28 (£8.20–£19). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 7pm–midnight.

Tía Elvira ARGENTINE BISTRO Tía Elvira is part restaurant, part mini-museum, with walls adorned by antique photos of the region and various artifacts collected by the owners during their 30 years in business. The menu features fairly straightforward Argentine dishes such as grilled meats, but the restaurant serves mostly simple seafood preparations, including king crab, trout, sea bass, and cod in a variety of sauces, such as Roquefort or Parmesan. Homemade pastas include lasagna and stuffed cannelloni. The restaurant is on the water front, with up-close views of the canal and the pier. It caters mostly to foreign tourists.

Maipú 349. ✆ **2901/424725.** www.tiaelvira.com. Main courses $14–$28 (£9.45–£19). MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 7–11:30pm.

Volver ARGENTINE It is worth stopping by just to see this crazy, kitschy restaurant on the waterfront. Volver is inside a century-old yellow tin-pan house. Old newspapers and signs wallpaper the interiors, which are also packed with oddball memorabilia, photos, football shirts, gadgets, spider crabs swimming in a tank, trinkets, and antiques. The food is pretty good, and includes regional dishes such as trout, crab, and lamb, plus homemade pastas. King crab comes a dozen different ways, in soups, casseroles, or with a side sauce. Desserts are primarily crepes with local fruits such as *calafate.* Service is a bit hit-or-miss, and the toilets ought to be better cleaned.

Maipú 37. ✆ **2901/423977.** Main courses $15–$24 (£10–£16). MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 7:30pm–midnight. Closed for lunch Mon.

WHAT TO SEE & DO IN & AROUND TOWN

Because Ushuaia rests on a steep hill, most businesses, traffic, and people seem to converge on the main street that lies at the bottom, Avenida San Martín. You will soon tire of walking up and down this busy thoroughfare, however, so it's worth making the effort to climb up and explore the city's other streets. The best way to get a feel for the landscape is to walk to the city park and up to the **Punto Panorámico,** a great lookout point, from where you get sweeping views of the city and the channel. The trail, which begins at the southwestern end of Avenida San Martín, is free. Construction is under way to improve the port and the coastal stretch, making it more pedestrian- and tourist-friendly.

Acuario de Ushuaia ★ Finds If the idea of jumping into the frigid waters of the channel is out of the question, visit this basic but highly interesting aquarium on the east side of town for a look at what it's like under the surface of the Beagle Channel. Be warned: You might be charmed by the king crabs and refuse to eat one again. It's a little expensive, but the aquarium gets top marks for environmental awareness, and was born from local, grass-roots efforts, receiving no government funds; and except for injured

animals, all specimens are returned to the water after a few months on display. You'll want to take a taxi, as it's on the channel, 3km (2 miles) east of downtown.

Av. Perito Moreno 2564, 3km (2 miles) from town. ✆ **2901/422980.** Admission $14 (£9.45) adults, $6 (£4.05) children 4–16, free for children 3 and under; group discounts available. Daily noon–8pm.

Glacier Martial/Aerosilla (Finds) Glacier Martial is a pleasant excursion that sits in Ushuaia's backyard. Avenida Luis Fernando Martial winds 7km (4¼ miles) up from town to the base of a beautiful mountain amphitheater. From here, a chairlift takes you on a thrilling ride to the small Glacier Martial ($12/£8.20). It's a long walk up the road, and there are no buses to take you there. Visitors usually hire a taxi for $12 (£8.20) and walk all the way back down, or arrange for the driver to pick them up later. At the base of the chairlift, don't miss a stop at **La Cabaña** ★ (✆ **2901/424257**), an excellent teahouse with a wraparound outdoor deck and mouthwatering cakes and pastries.

Av. Luis Fernando Martial, 7km (4¼ miles) from town. No phone. Admission $14 (£9.45) adults, $3 (£2) children 8 and under. Daily 9:45am–7pm.

Museo del Fin de Mundo ★ The main room of this museum displays an assortment of Indian hunting tools and colonial maritime instruments. There's also a natural history display of stuffed birds and a "grandfather's room" set up to resemble an old general store, packed with antique products. But the strength of this museum is its 60 history and nature videos available for viewing, and its reference library with more than 3,650 volumes, including a fascinating birth record. Its store has an excellent range of books about Patagonia for sale.

Maipú 175. ✆ **2901/421863.** Admission $8 (£5.40) adults, $2 (£1.35) students, free for children 13 and under. Daily 9am–8pm. Guided tours at 10:30am and 3 and 6pm.

Museo Marítimo y Presidio de Ushuaia ★★ (Moments) Ushuaia was populated primarily by the penal colony set up here in the late 1800s for hundreds of Argentina's most dangerous criminals. The rehabilitation system consisted of forced labor to build piers and buildings, and creative workshops for teaching carpentry, music, tailoring, and other trades—all of which, coincidentally, fueled the local economy. The museum offers a fascinating look into prisoners' and prison workers' lives through interpretive displays and artifacts. Here you can dwell in the cells of mass murderers and teenage anarchists and read about their unenviable existence in what must have been a grim place. The on-site restaurant serves "prison" meals and other theme items. The maritime museum displays famous ships and shipwrecks from the area. It's an outstanding museum.

Yaganes and Gobernador Paz. ✆ **2901/437481.** Admission $17 (£12) adults, free for children 4 and under. Daily 9am–8pm. Guided tours at 11:30am and 6pm.

Outdoor Activities

BOATING The best way to explore the Beagle Channel is by boat. Numerous companies offer a variety of trips, usually in modern catamarans with excellent guides. Many of them run kiosks near the pier; you'll see a cluster of them by the water. The most popular excursion is a half-day cruise of the Beagle Channel to view sea lions, penguins, and more. **Catamaranes Canoero** (✆ **2901/433893;** www.catamaranescanoero.com.ar) has a variety of options ranging from 2½ hours to 8 hours, on four different boats. **Motonave Barracuda** (✆ **2901/437066**) leaves twice daily for its 3-hour trip around the channel for $45 (£30) per person, stopping at Isla de Lobos, Isla de Pájaros, and a lighthouse. **Motovelero Tres Marías** (✆ **2901/421897**) also leaves twice daily and sails to

the same location; they accommodate a maximum of nine guests at a time, and they add an hour-long walk, crab fishing, cognac, and an underwater camera to the package, for $36 (£24) per person. From November through February, most companies visit the teeming penguin colony and pull the boats up to the shore where travelers can close in tight to watch these marvelous animals. It's $75 (£51). **Pira Tur,** B. Yaganes Casa 127 (✆ **2901/15-604646** [cell]), offers walking tours onto the colony with controlled groups. **Motovelero Patagonia Explorer** (✆ **2901/15-465842** [cell]) has an 18-passenger maximum and leaves daily; it visits the sea lion colony and includes a walk on the Isla Bridges for $50 (£34). This company also works with the Aventuras Isla Verde in the park for a full-day sail; inquire at their kiosk. **Ushuaia Boating,** Gob. Godoy 190 (✆ **2901/436193;** www.ushuaiaboating.com.ar), operates a small, speedy zodiac ferry to Chilean Puerto Williams. It costs $240 (£162) round-trip.

FISHING For a fishing license and information, go to the **Club de Pesca y Caza,** Av. San Martín 818 (no phone). It costs about $15 (£10) for foreigners per day.

SKIING Ushuaia's ski resort, **Cerro Castor** (✆ **2901/499301;** www.cerrocastor.com), is surprisingly good, with more than 400 skiable hectares (988 acres), 15 runs, three quad chairs and one double, a lodge/restaurant, and a slopeside bar. Day tickets cost $18 to $33 (£12–£22), depending on low or high season. The resort is open from June 15 to October 15. To get there, take the shuttle buses **Pasarela** (✆ **2901/433712**) or **Bella Vista** (✆ **2901/443161**); the fare is $12 (£8.20).

Tour Operators

One of the better agencies in town, **All Patagonia Viajes y Turismo,** Juana Fadul 60 (✆ **2901/433622;** www.allpatagonia.com), is the local American Express travel representative. It acts as a clearinghouse; if they don't offer a trip themselves, they'll arrange an excursion with other outfitters. They can also reserve excursions in other destinations in Argentina and Chile. All Patagonia offers three glacier walks for those in good physical condition, impressive scenic flights over Tierra del Fuego ($80/£54 per person for 30 min.), and treks and drives in its Land Rover with nature guides. They also arrange a bus and boat trip to Harberton and the penguin colony ($75/£51 per person), and they are one of the few agencies to operate afternoon tours of the national park. It is a very good company to approach if you're not sure what you want. **Canal Fun & Nature,** Rivadavía 82 (✆ **2901/437395;** www.canalfun.com), specializes in "unconventional tourism." It's a great company to choose if you're hankering after some hair-raising adventure. They staff excellent guides who provide 4WD trips and walks culminating with a barbecue. The company also leads kayaking and nighttime beaver-watching trips, and they'll custom-build a trip for you. They run private tours only on request. **Rumbo Sur,** Av. San Martín 350 (✆ **2901/422275;** www.rumbosur.com.ar), and **Tolkeyen Patagonia Turismo,** San Martín 1267 (✆ **2901/437073;** www.tolkeyenpatagonia.com), are two more-conventional operators that deal with larger groups and arrange more classic excursions, such as a city tour and guided visits to the national park and Lagos Escondido and Fagnano.

USHUAIA AFTER DARK

Nocturnal activities are somewhat sedate in this city. That is not to say it is completely dead, however, and there are some good bars to help you wash down that king crab dinner with some locally brewed beer. Two to try are **Dreamland,** 9 de Julio and Deloqui (✆ **2901/421246**), and **Dublin Irish Pub,** 9 de Julio 168 (✆ **2901/430744**).

Kuar With its cushioned mini-amphitheater facing a giant, shoreline view of the bay, Kuar is certainly the most avant-garde of Ushuaia's nightspots. The metal bar counter goes well with the ironclad menus, and the decor is a hip arrangement of chunky wooden furniture, colored-glass beading, and wrought-iron bar stools, in which design definitely trumps comfort. The bar brews its own beer, and patrons can view the fermenting tanks through a glass panel beneath the dining room. The restaurant offers standard fare (main courses $12–$22/£8.20–£15), but its main attraction is the bar with regular live music and theater performances. And here is the ultimate compliment—the toilets are reassuringly clean and immaculate. The bar is located 2km (1 1/4 miles) east of the city center. It's open Tuesday to Sunday from 5pm until 2am. Av. Perito Moreno 2232. ✆ **2901/437396.**

Saint Christopher The location couldn't be better—right on the water front with fabulous views of the bay and mountains, from the large windows that wrap around the entire building. Yet, like its namesake—the rusting hulk in the bay (a foundered ship)—the Saint Christopher has a certain worn-down, roadhouse feel. The decor has certainly seen better days. Yet this is *the* place, in these parts, for a late-night drink, dance, or meal (main courses $8–$13/£5.40–£8.80). A live band usually plays on weekends, and the place fills up with young Argentines looking to live it up and sing along to some popular *rock nacional.* It's open daily from 11am until 4am (until 5am Fri–Sat). Maipú 822. ✆ **2901/422423.** AE, MC, V.

Excursions Around Ushuaia

One of the most intriguing destinations around Ushuaia is the **Estancia Harberton,** the first ranch founded in Tierra del Fuego. Now run as a museum, it affords a fascinating glimpse into the area's pioneering past. The tour begins with a walk through a small nature reserve, where the guides discuss, in good English, the different plants from the area. The *estancia*'s missionary founders are buried in the graveyard, and nearby are some reconstructed houses used by the original natives. Just as interesting is the mothballed shearing shed, a marvelous step back in time to when the *estancia* was a thriving sheep farm. There is also a curious natural history museum of marine life bones and fossils. (***Note:*** To visit the museum, you must make reservations in advance; it's not included in the ordinary tour.) The ranch is located on the shore of the Beagle Channel, accessible by road or boat. The entrance fee is $9 (£6.10). Most travel agencies in town provide transportation to the *estancia,* 90km (56 miles) from Ushuaia, for an average cost of $65 (£44) per person, plus the entrance fee, provided you are among a group of four or more.

A Ride in the Park

If you don't feel like walking but still want to take in the sights at Parque Nacional Tierra Del Fuego, you can ride **El Tren del Fin del Mundo,** a vapor locomotive replica of the train used to shuttle prisoners to the forest to chop wood (✆ **2901/431600;** www.trendelfindelmundo.com.ar). It can be very touristy. The train departs from its station (with souvenir shop and cafe) near the park entrance three times daily. Just go one-way; a return trip is tediously slow. And don't bother with first class—it's not worth a light snack and souvenir. The 1-hour, 50-minute round-trip journey costs $30 (£20) for adults, $43 (£29) for first class, $7 (£4.75) for passengers 4 to 14, and free for children 3 and under.

Monster Trout on the Río Grande

The north of Tierra del Fuego is a brown plain of gentle, undulating hills and meandering rivers, punctuated by the occasional lonely *estancia.* It is a serene and desolate place without so much as a tree or a hedge for miles. Indeed, for many years, the only things you could find here were hardy ranchers, thousands of sheep, and wild herds of graceful guanacos.

One of those hardy ranchers decided to introduce trout to the local rivers, with the aim of creating a diversion for himself and his fly-fishing friends. Little did John Goodall know, when he first slipped some fingerlings into the gentle waters of the Río Grande back in the 1930s, that the area would become world famous for its trout. It's now a place of annual pilgrimage for thousands of fly-fishing fanatics. The trout thrived on the river, but they did even better when they discovered the rich Antarctic fishing grounds out to sea. The **sea run brown trout** had found its ideal habitat and grown accordingly; anglers are astounded to find fish as heavy as 30 pounds. Many say the Río Grande is the world's top location for fishing this type of trout.

Overfishing depleted stocks in the mid-1980s. In response, several *estancias* that controlled the upper Río Grande introduced strict conservation methods and catch-and-release restrictions. Their methods worked, and now those same *estancias* enjoy a steady stream of visitors seeking luxury accommodations on their fishing trips. The most famous is **La Villa de Estancia María Behety,** owned by the affable Alejandro Menéndez, who must be one of the few people in the world who can boast a river named after his family. The elegant family home, with a sparkling blue roof and commanding glass porch, has six opulent rooms. When guests are not fishing, they can partake of Alejandro's 10,000-bottle wine cellar and magnificent full-size snooker table—a relic of the Anglo-Argentines who used to work here. The property has another more modern but just as welcoming **Estancia María Behety Lodge** closer to the river that accommodates 12.

Estancia La Despedida is another popular fishing lodge. This ample log cabin offers very comfortable rooms and an inviting lounge with bar. The charismatic owner Danny Lajous speaks perfect English and regales guests with stories about the area.

For bookings from overseas, all three lodges work exclusively through a Californian outfitter called the **Fly Shop,** 4140 Churn Creek Rd., Redding, CA 96002 (✆ **800/669-3474** or 530/222-3555; fax 530/222-3572; www.theflyshop.com). All-inclusive 1-week packages start at $4,895 (£3,308) per person. All the *estancias* are close to the town of Río Grande, 180km (112 miles) north of Ushuaia.

Roughly from October to April, several tour companies offer a catamaran ride to the *estancia,* a 6-hour excursion for $85 (£57) per person; try **All Patagonia,** Juana Fadul 60 (✆ **2901/433622**). Tour groups will also arrange a boat excursion to a **penguin colony** from the *estancia,* an add-on excursion that costs about $67 (£45) per person.

After the turnoff for Estancia Harberton, RN 3 begins to descend down to **Lago Escondido,** a beautiful lake about 60km (37 miles) north of Ushuaia. It provides a quiet spot for relaxation or for fishing the mammoth trout that live in the lake.

North of Ushuaia and in the middle of the island of Tierra del Fuego, the landscape changes. Icy mountains give way to dry rolling hills. A massive lake, **Lago Fagnano,** dominates. It almost slices the island in half. This is a nice place for a day trip—the weather is almost always sunnier at Tolhuin, the village on the east side of Lago Fagnano. The easiest option is to rent a car and drive yourself here. The nicest hotel, by far, is red-roofed **Hosteria Kaiken,** RN 3 Km 2942 (✆ **02901/492372**). It's 100km (62 miles) from Ushuaia. A visit to Tolhuin is not complete without a visit to the local bakery **Panadería La Union,** Cerro Jerujupen 450 (✆ **2901/492202**), for empanadas and pastries.

Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego

Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego was created in 1960 to protect a 63,000-hectare (155,610-acre) chunk of Patagonian wilderness that includes mighty peaks, crystalline rivers, black-water swamps, and forests of *lenga,* or deciduous beech. Only 2,000 hectares (4,940 acres) are designated recreation areas, some of which offer a chance to view dams built by the beavers that were introduced to Tierra del Fuego in the 1950s. Another eyebrow-raiser is the multitude of rabbits that roam the park.

It's the only Argentine national park with a maritime coast, but chances are you won't be blown away by it if you've been traveling around southern Argentina or Chile. Much of the landscape is identical to Patagonia's thousands of kilometers of mountainous terrain, but it does afford easy and medium day hikes to let you stretch your legs, breathe some fresh air, take a boat ride, or bird-watch. In some areas, the road runs through thick beech forest and then abruptly opens into wide views of mountains, whose dramatic height can be viewed from sea level to more than 2,000m (6,560 ft.). Anglers can fish for trout here in the park but must first pick up a license at the **National Park Administration office,** Av. San Martín 1395 (✆ **2901/421315;** Mon–Fri 9am–3pm), in Ushuaia. The park service issues maps at the park entrance showing the walking trails here, ranging from 300m (984 ft.) to 8km (5 miles); admission into the park is $10 (£6.80). Parque Nacional Tierra del Fuego is 11km (6 3/4 miles) west of Ushuaia on RN 3. Camping in the park is free; there are no services, but potable water is available. At the end of the road to Lago Roca, there is a snack bar/restaurant. At Bahía Ensenada, you'll find boats that take visitors to Isla Redonda, where there are several walking trails. The cost is about $12 (£8.20), or $19 (£13) with a guide. All tour companies offer guided trips to the park. Trips last 4 hours and cost $40 (£27). If all you need is transportation there, call these shuttle bus companies: **Pasarela** (✆ **2901/433712**) or **Patagonia Transfers** (✆ **2901/445486**). The round-trip cost $10 (£6.80). Buses leave from Maípu Street in front of the main pier.

2 PUERTO WILLIAMS, CHILE

Puerto Williams is the southernmost town in the world, though it functions primarily as a naval base with a population of fewer than 2,500 residents. The town occupies the northern shore of Isla Navarino in the Beagle Channel, an altogether enchanting location framed by towering granite needles called the Navarino's Teeth. It's much more wild, remote, and undiscovered than Ushuaia, its Argentine neighbor across the channel. Just

getting here is an adventure, and there's a good chance you'll get stuck here due to bad weather that rules out either boat or plane travel! There are some outstanding hiking trails; some say it's set to be the next Torres del Paine. Still, you'll have to do a lot of logistical work to make a trip here happen. But really, there is a certain cachet to setting foot in this isolated village and knowing you're at the end of the world.

The best way to visit Puerto Williams is via ship, ranging from a zodiac that whizzes across the Beagle Channel (in good weather only) to regular service cargo ships. The Yamana culture, which so perplexed the first Europeans in their ability to withstand their harsh environment with little clothing, is long gone; but visitors may still view the last vestiges of their settlements and a well-designed anthropological museum in town. There are plans to improve the airport, start a ferry service from Ushuaia, and finally bring Internet to the town.

GETTING THERE

BY AIR **Aerovías DAP,** O'Higgins 891 (✆ **61/223340** in Punta Arenas, or 61/621051 in Puerto Williams; www.aeroviasdap.cl), runs a handful of flights per week from Punta Arenas.

BY BOAT **Ushuaia Boating,** Gob. Godoy 190, Ushuaia (✆ **2901/436193;** www.ushuaiaboating.com.ar), runs a small, speedy zodiac service to and from Puerto Williams, whenever they have enough people to fill the boat (minimum three) and whenever weather permits, for $130 (£88) one-way and $240 (£162) return. The passenger and cargo ferry **Transbordadora Austral Broom** offers cheaper passage to Puerto Williams, with a 34-hour journey from Punta Arenas (Av. Bulnes 05075; ✆ **61/218100;** www.tabsa.cl). During the summer, the ferry leaves Punta Arenas four times a month on Wednesday and returns on Saturday; sleeping arrangements consist of reclining seats ($175/£118 adult one-way) and bunks ($210/£142 adult one-way). Kids receive a 50% discount. **Victory Adventure Expeditions,** based out of Puerto Williams at Teniente Munoz 118, #70 (✆ **61/621010;** www.victory-cruises.com), specializes in sailing journeys around the Beagle Channel and Cape Horn, and as far away as Antarctica. The schooner-style ships are not luxurious, but they are warm and comfortable, and their small size allows for a more intimate, hands-on journey than the *Australis* cruises. A 2-week expedition that includes Cape Horn and the glaciers of Tierra del Fuego costs $3,100 (£2,095) per person. **SIM Expeditions,** in Puerto Williams (office located in the Coiron Guesthouse; ✆ **61/621150;** www.simltd.com), is an interesting agency with a 6-passenger and a 12-passenger yacht that take visitors on 5- to 12-day journeys around Cape Horn and past the Darwin mountain range; contact the agency for prices. For general travel agency needs, including city tours, airline tickets, and hotel reservations, contact **Turismo Akainij,** Uspashum 156 (✆ **61/21327;** turismoakainij@chileaustral.com).

WHAT TO SEE & DO

The **Museo Martín Gusinde,** Aragay 01 (✆ **61/621043**), is open Monday to Thursday and Saturday from 10am to 1pm and 3 to 6pm, featuring a good collection of Yaghan and Yamana Indian artifacts, ethnographic exhibits, and stuffed birds and animals. The museum's docent is an anthropologist, naturalist, and all-around expert in the region; he is usually on hand to provide tours in the area. About 3km (1 3/4 miles) southeast of Puerto Williams on the main road, at the La Virgen cascade, is a medium-level **hiking trail** with an exhilarating, sweeping panorama of the Beagle Channel, the Dientes de

Navarino mountain range, and Puerto Williams. The hike takes 3 hours round-trip. One of Chile's best backpacking trails, the **Dientes de Navarino Circuit** ★★, is here, thanks to an Australian who blazed the trail in 1991. The circuit is 53km (33 miles) in length, goes through very remote mountains, and takes at least 4 days to walk; the difficulty level is medium to high. The trail is open only from late November to April; otherwise, snow makes this walk dangerous and disorienting. The best map is JLM's *Tierra del Fuego* map, sold in most shops and bookstores.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

There's a new option in town that's filled the void for those looking for more than a bed with a pillow: **Hotel Lakutaia,** Seno Lauta s/n (✆ **61/621721;** www.lakutaia.cl), offers simple luxury in 24 rooms, all with private bathrooms. They offer all-inclusive 4-day package that include flights from Punta Arenas, trekking, sailing, horseback riding, and all meals starting at $1,970 (£1,331) per person. Otherwise, pickings are slim but reasonably priced. Basic, clean accommodations can be found at the **Hostería Camblor,** Calle Patricio Capdeville 41 (✆ **61/621033;** hosteriacamblor@hotmail.com), which has modern rooms for $38 (£26) or $58 (£39) per person (including meals and transfer). Some rooms come with a kitchenette. The Camblor also has a restaurant that occasionally serves as the local disco on Friday and Saturday nights, so noise could be a problem. Another simple but comfortable place is the **Hostal Coirón,** Ricardo Maragano 168 (✆ **61/621227;** hostalcoiron@tie.cl), with doubles for $45 (£30). For dining, try the convivial **Club de Yates Micalvi** (✆ **61/621042**), housed in an old supply ship that is docked at the pier. It serves as the meeting spot for an international crowd of adventurers sailing around Cape Horn. Or try **Los Dientes de Navarino** (✆ **61/621074**), on the plaza. Also try the **Restaurant Cabo de Hornos,** Ricardo Maragano 146 (on the second floor; ✆ **61/621067**), for Chilean specialties.

3 ANTARCTICA

The coldest spot on the planet is one of the hottest destinations for travelers seeking the next great adventure. Antarctica is its own continent, but the hook of the Antarctic Peninsula is closest to the tip of South America, and so the majority of visitors depart for Antarctica from Ushuaia.

Antarctica is home to exotic wildlife and landscapes that are equally savage and beautiful. Be prepared for ice like you've never seen it: monumental peacock-blue icebergs shaped in surreal formations, craggy glaciers that crash into the sea, sheer ice-encrusted walls that form magnificent canals, and jagged peaks that jut out of icy fields. A major highlight here is the penguins—colonies of several hundred thousand can be found nesting and chattering away throughout the area. Humpback, orca, and minke whales are often visible, nosing out of the frigid water, as are elephant, Weddell, leopard, and crabeater seals. Bird-watchers can spend hours studying the variety of unique seabirds that reside here, including petrels and albatrosses.

Most importantly, Antarctica sits at the end of the world, which is reason alone to compel many people to venture here. Like the early explorers who first visited this faraway continent in the 1800s, travelers today revel in the chance to explore a pristine region where relatively few humans have stepped foot before. But Antarctica's remoteness comes with a toll: No matter how you get here, it's not cheap. The tediously long travel

 time, amid sometimes uncomfor table conditions, heightens the price that this r egion exacts fr om trav elers. N evertheless, many of Antar ctica's 30,000 y early visitors would agree that it's worth the effort.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The history of exploration and the disco very of the Antarctic continent are littered with claims, counterclaims, tall tales, intrigue, and suffering. Captain J ames Cook discovered the S outh S andwich and S outh G eorgia I slands in 1773 (a par t of Antar ctica, these islands are a B ritish possession), but he nev er spotted the Antar ctic continent. H e did, however, set off a seal-hunting fr enzy, after r eporting the large colonies he found ther e; it's estimated that sealers eventually discovered around a third of the islands in the region. Two sealers w ere the first to actually step foot on the continent: the American J ohn Davis, at Hughes Bay in 1821, and the British James Weddell, at Saddle Island in 1823. During a scientific expedition in 1840, the American navy lieutenant Charles Wilkes finally concluded that Antar ctica was not a series of islands and ice packs, but rather a contiguous landmass.

The South Pole eluded explorers for another 90 years, until Norwegian Roald Admudsen and his w ell-prepared five-man team r eached it on D ecember 4, 1911. Amundsen's arrival at the pole accounted for one of histor y's most r emarkable expeditions ev er. His feat, however, was eclipsed by tragedy: His rival, the British captain Robert Scott, reached the pole 33 days later , only to find Amundsen 's tent and a note. Scott and his par ty, already suffering from scurvy and exposure, froze to death on their return trip, just 18km (11 miles) from their ship.

No other destination has held such cachet for adv enturous explor ers. I n 1915, the I rish explorer Ernest Shackleton deemed Antarctica "the last great journey left to man." Shackleton attempted to cross the Antarctic continent but never achieved his goal: Pack ice trapped and sank his boat. The entire party miraculously survived for 1 year on a diet of penguin and seal, before Shackleton sailed to South Georgia Island in a lifeboat to get help .

Today, 27 nations send personnel to Antar ctica to per form seasonal and y ear-round research. The population v aries from 4,000 people in the summer to r oughly 1,000 in the winter. A total of 42 stations operate y ear-round, and an additional 32 r un in summer only. The stations study world climactic changes and can be instrumental in improving the envir onment. I n 1985, for instance, r esearchers at the B ritish H alley station discovered a growing hole in the oz one layer. This prompted the M ontreal P rotocol, in 1987, to cut back on CFC emissions.

PLANNING YOUR TRIP TO ANTARCTICA

Visitor Information

Numerous websites offer helpful information about Antar ctica. A few of the best are:

- **www .iaato.org**: This is the official website of the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators. It is important that your tour group be a member of the IAATO. Most cr uise operators ar e members. M embership in the organization ensur es a safe and envir onmentally r esponsible visit to Antar ctica. S tatistics, general information, and news can be found on this w ebsite.
- **www .discoveringantarctica.com**: This educational site has the nuts and bolts behind natural and human life on the fr ozen continent.
- **www .antarcticconnection.com**: This site offers trav el information, tour operator links, and Antarctica-related items for sale, including maps and videos.

Entry Requirements

No single country claims Antarctica as its territory, so visas are unnecessary. You will need a passport, however, for unscheduled stops and for your first stop in either Argentina or Chile (see chapter 3 for information about entry requirements).

When to Go

Tours to Antarctica are conducted between November and March—after March, temperatures dip to lows of –100°F (–38°C), and the sun disappears until September. The opposite is true of the summer months (Dec–Mar), and visitors can expect sunlight up to 18 to 24 hours a day, depending on where you are in Antarctica. Summer

temperatures near the Antarctic Peninsula vary between lows of 5°F to 10°F (–15°C to –12°C), and highs of 35°F to 60°F (2°C–16°C).

What you see during your journey to Antarctica may depend on when you go. November is mating season for penguins and other birds, and visitors can view their offspring in December and January. The best months for whale-watching are February and March.

Safety

EXTREME WEATHER Cold temperatures, the wind-chill factor, and perspiration conspire to prohibit the human body from keeping itself warm in Antarctica. Travelers need to outfit themselves in the highest-quality outdoor clothing available. Tour operators are constantly amazed at how under-prepared people can be when they visit Antarctica, and so they will provide clients with a packing checklist. Ask your tour company if it provides its guests with waterproof outerwear or if you are expected to bring your own. The thin ozone layer and the glare from snow, water, and ice make a high-factor sunscreen, a hat, and sunglasses imperative as well.

SPECIAL HEALTH CONCERNS *Everyone* should bring anti–motion sickness medication on their trip to Antarctica. If you are suffering from a special health problem or taking prescription medication, bring a signed and dated letter from your physician for medical authorities, in case of an emergency. Delays of up to 4 weeks aren't uncommon on guided trips to the interior, so visitors should seriously consider the extremity of such a journey, submit themselves to a full medical exam before their departure, and bring the quantity of medication necessary for a long delay.

MEDICAL SAFETY & EVACUATION INSURANCE All passenger ships have a physician on board in the event of a medical problem or emergency; however, passengers should discuss an evacuation policy with each operator. Emergency evacuation can be hindered by bad weather, and anyone with an unstable medical condition needs to keep this in mind. Also, check your health insurance to verify that it includes evacuation, because it can be unbelievably expensive. From the Shetland Islands alone, it costs $40,000 (£27,000) to evacuate one person.

GETTING THERE

By Ship

Few would have guessed that the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s would spawn tourism in Antarctica. But when Russian scientific ship crews found themselves without a budget, they spruced up the ships' interiors and began renting the vessels out to tour operators on a rotating basis. These ships (as well as others that have since come on the market) are specially built for polar seas, complete with antiroll stabilizers and ice-strengthened hulls. A few of these ships have icebreakers that can chip through just about anything.

Before you go, it helps to know that a tour's itinerary is a rough guide of what to expect on your journey. Turbulent weather and ice conditions can cause delays or detours. Wildlife sightings may prompt your group to linger longer in one area than the next. The ship's crew and the expedition leader of your tour will keep you informed of any changes to the program.

Typical Itineraries

Tour companies offer roughly similar trajectories for cruises to Antarctica, with the exception of a few over-the-top cruises. (Got a month and $37,000/£25,000?) Then Quark Expeditions conducts a semi-circumnavigation of Antarctica.) Apart from the destinations listed below, cruises attempt to land at research stations when it's convenient. Most Antarctic cruises leave from Ushuaia, in Argentina, but a tiny fraction leave from New Zealand. Chile used to be a departure site for Antarctica, but few if any travelers now leave from Chile; those who do make the journey aboard a military ship. Plan to leave from Ushuaia; it's the fastest departure point.

Remember to factor in 2 days to cross the Drake Passage (4 days total for the return trip, if you're traveling to the Antarctic Peninsula). During this time, you won't do much more than hang out, relax, take part in educational lectures, and suffer through occasional bouts of seasickness. Cruises typically last 8 to 13 days for the Antarctic Peninsula, and 18 to 21 days for journeys that include the Subantarctic Islands. Seasoned travelers have frequently said that 8-day trips are not much of a value; consider tacking on 2 extra days for a 10-day trip.

THE ANTARCTIC PENINSULA This is the easiest site to visit in Antarctica. Due to its rich variety of wildlife and dramatic scenery, it makes for a magnificent introduction to the "White Continent." If you have a short amount of time and/or a limited budget, these trips are for you.

All tours stop at the **South Shetland Islands.** Historically, sealers and whalers used these islands as a base; today they're home to research stations, colonies of elephant seals, and a variety of nesting penguins and seabirds. Popular sites here are **King Island, Livingston Island,** and **Deception Cove**—a collapsed, active volcanic crater with bubbling pools of thermal water.

Tours continue on to the eastern side of the Antarctic Peninsula, making stops to view wildlife such as Weddell and leopard seals and vast colonies of Adélie, chinstrap, and Gentoo penguins. At the peninsula, sites such as the **Lemaire** and **Neumayar** channels afford camera-worthy views of narrow, sheer-walled canals made of ice and rock. At **Paradise Harbor,** calving icebergs theatrically crash from the harbor's main glacier, and throughout the area, outlandishly shaped gigantic icebergs float by. Other popular stops include **Port Lockroy,** a former British base that is now run as a museum; **Cuverville** and **Rongé** islands, with their penguin colonies; and **Elephant Island,** named for the huge, sluglike elephant seals that inhabit it.

THE POLAR CIRCLE Ships with ice-breaking capabilities can transport guests past the Antarctic Circle, below 66 degrees 33'S, and into the zone of 24-hour sunlight. The highlight here is **Marguerite Bay,** with its abundant orca, minke, and humpback whales, and multitudinous Adélie penguins. These cruises typically stop for a fascinating tour of research stations, both ultramodern and abandoned ones.

THE WEST SIDE & THE WEDDELL SEA Longer tours to the peninsula might include visits to its west side, known as "iceberg alley" for the mammoth, tabular chunks of ice floating by slowly. Stops include the rarely visited **Paulet Island,** an intriguing crater island, and **James Ross** and **Vega** islands, known for their nesting colonies of Adélie penguins.

An even longer trip (or simply a different itinerary) takes travelers to the distant **Weddell Sea,** which is blanketed with a vast expanse of pack ice, looking much like a frozen sea. But that's just one of the highlights here; the real reason visitors pay extra time and

 money to reach this white wonderland is because of the colonies of emperor penguins that reside here. Rugged mountains and glaciers are also part of the view.

SUBANTARCTIC ISLANDS Tours to the Subantarctic Islands begin or end with a trip to the Antarctic Peninsula and the Shetland Islands, which is the reason why these tours run 18 to 21 days. A few of these faraway islands are little visited by tourists, and they instill a sense of adventure in the traveler for their remoteness and fascinating geography, not to mention their important historical aspects.

The first stop is usually the **Falkland (Malvinas) Islands,** to view bird life, especially king penguins, and to tour the Victorian port town of Stanley. Some tours fly directly from Santiago, Chile, to the Falklands, and then begin the sailing journey there.

One of the most magnificent places on earth, **South Georgia Island** is surely a highlight of this trip. Its dramatic landscapes, made of rugged peaks, fiords, and beaches, are home to a staggering array of wildlife. South Georgia Island is also subject to unpredictable weather. Trip landings here risk cancellation far more frequently than other sites. Some tours tack on visits to the **South Orkney Islands** (with their dense area of Antarctic hairgrass—an indigenous flowering plant) and the actively volcanic **South Sandwich Islands.**

Tour Operators

Prices vary depending on the length of the trip, the company you choose, and the sleeping arrangements you require. A 9-day journey in a room with three bunks and a shared bathroom runs about $4,500 (£3,040) per person. A 21-day journey with lodging in a corner-window suite runs between $12,000 (£8,100) and $15,000 (£10,130) per person. Shop around to find something to suit your needs and budget.

Prices include passage, meals, guides, and all excursions. Some tours offer scuba diving, kayaking, over-flights, or alpine trekking, usually at an additional cost. When researching trips, also consider the size of the ship: Tour companies offer space for anywhere from 50 to 600 passengers. Most travelers like to share their space with fewer people; even for those who enjoy the camaraderie of a crowd, more than 100 to 150 guests is overkill. The International Association Antarctic Treaty Organization limits landings to 100 people, meaning large ships must conduct landings in turns.

A few well-known tour operators include:

- **Abercrombie & Kent,** 1520 Kensington Rd., Ste. 212, Oak Brook, IL 60523-2141 (✆ **800/544-7016** or 630/954-2944; fax 630/954-3324; www.abercrombiekent.com). Like Quark, A&K offers deluxe journeys, with trips that last 11 to 20 days.
- **Antarctica Expeditions,** Guido 1852, Office B, 4th Floor, Buenos Aires C1119AAB (✆ **54-11/4806-6326;** fax 54-11/4804-9474; www.antarcticacruises.com.ar). Based in Buenos Aires, Zelfa Silva and her husband Gunnar are seasoned Antarctica travelers and expert trip-planning consultants.
- **Antarctic Shipping,** Ebro 2740, Las Condes, Santiago, Chile (✆ **877/972-3531;** www.antarctic.cl). With a newly remodeled boat, this Chilean company began trips in 2004.
- **Antarpply Expeditions,** Gobernador Paz 663, Ushuaia 9410 (✆ **54-2901/433636;** fax 54-2901/437728; www.antarpply.com). From their office in Ushuaia, Antarpply runs 10-night, 11-day cruises that start at $6,410 (£4,328).
- **Aurora Expeditions,** 182A Cumberland St., The Rocks, NSW 2000, Australia (✆ **02/9252-1033;** fax 02/9252-1373; www.auroraexpeditions.com.au). This Australian company organizes a variety of educational, photographic, and climbing tours for small groups.

- **Fathom Expeditions,** 416 Moore Ave., Ste. 204, Toronto, Ontario M4G 1C9 (✆ **800/621-0176** or 416/646-2688; www.fathomexpeditions.com). A Canadian company that is run by former expedition leaders, Fathom's trips tend to be a bit longer, and a bit less hurried.
- **Lindblad Expeditions,** 720 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10019 (✆ **800/397-3348** or 212/765-7740; www.expeditions.com). This venerable Swedish-run company was the first to bring tourists to Antarctica. It offers 11- to 28-day tours, with trekking. In 2008, they launched the *National Geographic Explorer.*
- **Oceanwide Expeditions,** Bellamypark 9, Vlissingen, Netherlands (✆ **800/453-7245** or 31-118/410410; www.oceanwide-expeditions.com). This Dutch company operates a variety of journeys aboard its own ship.
- **Peregrine Adventures,** 258 Lonsdale St., Melbourne, VIC 3000, Australia (✆ **1300/854444** in Australia, or 03/9662-2700 outside Australia; fax 03/9662-2442; www.peregrine.net.au). This Australian company is the only operator that doesn't charge solo travelers a single supplement.
- **Quark Expeditions,** 980 Post Rd., Darien, CT (✆ **800/356-5699** or 203/656-0499; www.quarkexpeditions.com). This highly esteemed company offers the industry's most outrageous trips, including complete circumnavigations.

By Plane

Apart from working for a research station, one of the few ways to get out and really explore the Antarctic continent is by plane. A handful of companies offer a small selection of astonishing, out-of-this-world journeys to the Antarctic interior and beyond.

Flights to the Antarctic can be divided into two distinct categories: flights that access man-made airstrips on certain islands close to the peninsula, and flights that penetrate the frigid interior, relying on natural ice and snow runways for landing areas. The logistics involved in flying to the Antarctic are complicated, to say the least, and fuel becomes an issue. Make no mistake: Air travel to the Antarctic is a serious undertaking. The rewards, however, can be unforgettable.

From Punta Arenas, Chile, King George Island on the peninsula is the preferred destination. The island houses a number of research stations, some of which can be visited. It boasts extraordinary wildlife and sightseeing opportunities. The average stay is 1 or 2 days, but weather delays can alter itineraries.

Tips Last-Minute Reduced Fares to Antarctica

Some travel agencies in Ushuaia offer reduced fares for last-minute bookings, but this is by no means guaranteed. Be prepared to hang around Ushuaia for up to 2 weeks without any certainty that you will score a berth. If you do, however, prices can be 10% to 50% lower than the advertised rate. Two agencies to try are **All Patagonia,** Juana Fadul 60, Ushuaia, Argentina (✆ **2901/433622;** fax 2901/430707; www.allpatagonia.com), and **Rumbo Sur,** Av. San Martín 350, Ushuaia, Argentina (✆ **2901/422441;** fax 2901/430699; www.rumbosur.com.ar). Note that the best time to snag discounted rates is late November to early December, before the onset of the high-travel season in southern Argentina.

The severity of the landscape and the remoteness of the Antarctic interior call for special considerations when you're planning and preparing for an unexpectedly prolonged stay. All travelers attempting a trip to the interior should be aware of the extreme climatic conditions. Travel delays caused by severe weather are the norm. These trips, however, represent adventure travel in its purest form.

Tour Operators

Prices vary depending on the company and the destination. In general, flights to the peninsula are much cheaper than those to the interior. As expected, these all-inclusive trips can cost anywhere from $15,000 to $38,000 (£10,130–£25,680) per person, depending on the destination. Logistical support for extended expeditions can easily run to over $40,000 (£27,000). Prices typically include transportation, meals, and guides.

- **Adventure Network International,** 4800 N. Federal Hwy., Ste. 307D, Boca Raton, FL 33431 (✆ **801/266-4876** or 561/347-7523; fax 801/266-1592; www.adventure-network.com). This company began as a private plane service for climbers headed for Vinson Massif, the highest peak in Antarctica. They now include several 7- to 22-day tours, such as flights to the South Pole and the Transantarctic and Ellsworth mountain ranges, an emperor penguin safari, and a 60-day ski trip to the South Pole. Activities planned during these trips can include hiking, skiing, and Ski-Doo trips; overnight camping; and ice hockey, igloo building, and just about anything else related to ice.
- **Aerovías DAP,** O'Higgins, Punta Arenas (✆ **61/223340;** fax 61/221693; www.aeroviasdap.cl). This small Chilean airline specializes in charter flights to the peninsula, in particular King George Island.
- **Antarctica XXI S.A.** (✆ **61/614100;** fax 61/614105; www.antarcticaxxi.com). A new Chilean company, this group offers 6-day trips that include daily flights. Departing from Punta Arenas and based out of King George Island.

Appendix A: Argentina Fast Facts & Websites

1 FAST FACTS: ARGENTINA

AMERICAN EXPRESS Offices are located in Buenos Aires, Bariloche, Salta, San Martín, and Ushuaia. In Buenos Aires, the Amex office is at Arenales 707 (✆ **11/4310-3000**).

BUSINESS HOURS Banks are open weekdays from 10am to 3pm. Shopping hours are weekdays from 9am to 8pm and Saturday from 9am to 1pm. Shopping centers are open daily from 10am to 8pm. Some stores close for lunch.

CLIMATE See "When to Go," in chapter 3.

CURRENCY See "Money & Costs," in chapter 3.

DOCUMENTS See "Entry Requirements & Customs," in chapter 3.

DRIVING RULES In cities, Argentines drive exceedingly fast and do not always obey traffic lights or lanes. Seat belts are mandatory, although few Argentines actually wear them. When driving outside the city, remember that *autopista* means motorway or highway, and *paso* means mountain pass. Don't drive in rural areas at night, as cattle sometimes overtake the road to keep warm and are nearly impossible to see.

DRUGSTORES Ask your hotel where the nearest pharmacy *(farmacia)* is; they are generally ubiquitous in city centers, and there is always at least one open 24 hours. In Buenos Aires, the chain **Farmacity** is open 24 hours, with locations at Lavalle 919 (✆ **11/4821-3000**), and Av. Santa Fe 2830 (✆ **11/4821-0235**). Farmacity will also deliver to your hotel.

ELECTRICITY If you plan to bring any small appliance with you, pack a transformer and a European-style adapter because electricity in Argentina runs on 220 volts. Note that most laptops operate on both 110 and 220 volts. Luxury hotels usually have transformers and adapters available.

EMBASSIES All in Buenos Aires: **U.S. Embassy,** Av. Colombia 4300 (✆ 11/4774-5333); **Australian Embassy,** Villanueva 1400 (✆ 11/4777-6580); **Canadian Embassy,** Tagle 2828 (✆ 11/4805-3032); **New Zealand Embassy,** Carlos Pellegrini 1427, 5th Floor (✆ 11/4328-0747); **United Kingdom Embassy,** Luis Agote 2412 (✆ 11/4803-6021).

EMERGENCIES The following emergency numbers are valid throughout Argentina. For an **ambulance,** call ✆ **107;** in case of **fire,** call ✆ **100;** for **police** assistance, call ✆ **101.**

INFORMATION See "Visitor Information," in chapter 3.

INTERNET ACCESS Cybercafes called *locuturios* are found on every corner in

Buenos Aires and in other cities and towns as well, so it won't be hard to stay connected while in Argentina. Access is reasonably priced (usually averaging just under $1 per hour) and connections are reliably good.

MAIL Airmail postage for a standard letter from Argentina to North America and Europe is about $3. Mail takes, on average, between 7 and 10 days to get to the U.S. and Europe.

MAPS Reliable maps can be purchased at the offices of the **Automóvil Club Argentino,** Av. del Libertador 1850, in Buenos Aires (✆ **11/4802-6061** or 11/4802-7071).

SAFETY See "Health & Safety," in chapter 3.

SMOKING People who hate smoke can rejoice. Antismoking laws have finally been passed in Buenos Aires, as well as a few other Argentine cities. These are among the few laws actually paid attention to in Argentina.

TAXES Argentina's value added tax (VAT) is 21%. You can recover this 21% at the airport if you have purchased certain local products totaling more than 70 pesos (per invoice) from stores participating in tax-free shopping. Forms are available at the airport and participating stores, but beware that you may be asked to display your purchases when leaving.

TELEPHONE The country code for Argentina is **54.** When making domestic long-distance calls in Argentina, place a 0 before the area code. For international calls, add 00 before the country code. Direct dialing to North America and Europe is available from most phones. International, as well as domestic, calls are expensive in Argentina, especially from hotels (rates fall 10pm–8am). Holders of AT&T credit cards can reach the money-saving **USA Direct** from Argentina by calling toll-free ✆ **0800/555-4288** from the north of Argentina or 0800/222-1288 from the south. Similar services are offered by **MCI** (✆ **0800/555-1002**) and **Sprint** (✆ **0800/555-1003** from the north of Argentina, or 0800/222-1003 from the south).

Public phones take either phone cards (sold at kiosks on the street) or coins (less common). Local calls cost 20 centavos to start and charge more the longer you talk. Telecentro offices—found everywhere in city centers—offer private phone booths where calls are paid when completed. Most hotels offer fax services, as do all Telecentro offices. Dial ✆ **110** for directory assistance (most operators speak English) and ✆ **000** to reach an international operator.

TIME Argentina is 1 hour ahead of Eastern Standard Time in the United States in northern summer. In 2007, the country introduced daylight saving time in the east of the country with Buenos Aires and the coast moving forward 1 hour from December 30 to March 16. This means the capital will be 3 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time in northern winter, while the Andean provinces will be 2 hours ahead.

TIPPING A 10% tip is expected at cafes and restaurants. Give at least $1 to bellboys and porters, 5% to hair dressers, and leftover change to taxi drivers.

WATER In Buenos Aires, the water is perfectly safe to drink. But if you are traveling to more remote regions of Argentina, it's best to stick with bottled water for drinking.

2 WEBSITES

MAJOR U.S. AIRLINES

American Airlines
www.aa.com

Delta Air Lines
www.delta.com

Northwest Airlines
www.nwa.com

United Airlines
www.united.com

MAJOR INTERNATIONAL AIRLINES

Aerolíneas Argentinas
www.aerolineas.com.ar

Air France
www.airfrance.com

Air India
www.airindia.com

British Airways
www.british-airways.com

Cathay Pacific
www.cathaypacific.com

Emirates Airlines
www.emirates.com

Japan Airlines
www.jal.co.jp

KLM
www.klm.com

Korean Air
www.koreanair.com

LAN Airlines
www.lan.com

Lufthansa
www.lufthansa.com

Qantas Airways
www.qantas.com

Qatar Airways
www.qatarairways.com

Singapore Airlines
www.singaporeair.com

South African Airways
www.flysaa.com

Swiss Air
www.swiss.com

TAM
www.tam.com.br

Thai Airways International
www.thaiair.com

MAJOR HOTEL & MOTEL CHAINS

Crowne Plaza Hotels
www.crowneplaza.com

Four Seasons
www.fourseasons.com

Hilton Hotels
www.hilton.com

Holiday Inn
www.holidayinn.com

Hyatt
www.hyatt.com

InterContinental Hotels & Resorts
www.ichotelsgroup.com

Marriott
www.marriott.com

Sheraton Hotels & Resorts
www.sheraton.com

Westin Hotels & Resorts
www.westin.com

Appendix B: Survival Spanish

Argentine Spanish has a rich, almost Italian sound, with the double "ll" and "y" pronounced with a "j"-like sound. So *llave* (key) sounds like "*zha*-ve" and *desayuno* (breakfast) sounds like "de-sa-*zhu*-no." *Usted* (the formal "you") is used extensively, and *vos* is a form of "you" that's even more familiar than *tú* (informal "you"). Peculiar terms you may come across only in Argentine include *bárbaro* (very cool); Porteño (a resident of Buenos Aires); *pasos* (steps in a tango); *bandoneón* (a cousin of the accordion, used in tango music); and *subte* (the Buenos Aires subway). **Uruguayan Spanish** closely resembles the Spanish spoken in Buenos Aires.

BASIC WORDS & PHRASES

English	Spanish	Pronunciation
Good day	**Buenos días**	*bweh*-nohss *dee*-ahss
How are you?	**¿Cómo está?**	*koh*-moh ehss-*tah*
Very well	**Muy bien** mw	ee byehn
Thank you	**Gracias**	*grah*-syahss
You're welcome	**De nada** deh	*nah*-dah
Goodbye	**Adiós** ah-	*dyohss*
Please	**Por favor** pohr	fah-*bohr*
Yes	**Sí** see	
No	**No** noh	
Excuse me (to get by someone)	**Perdóneme** pehr-	*doh*-neh-meh
Excuse me (to begin a question)	**Disculpe**	dees-*kool*-peh
Give me	**Déme**	*deh*-meh
Where is . . . ?	**¿Dónde está . . . ?**	*dohn*-deh ehss-*tah*
the station	**la estación** lah	ehss-tah-*syohn*
a hotel	**un hotel** oon	oh-*tel*
a gas station	**una estación de servicio** sehr-	*oo*-nah ehss-tah-*syohn* deh *bee*-syoh
a restaurant	**un restaurante** oon	res-tow-*rahn*-teh
the toilet	**el baño** el	*bah*-nyoh
a good doctor	**un buen médico** oon	bwehn *meh*-dee-coh
the road to . . .	**el camino a/hacia . . .** el	cah-*mee*-noh ah/*ah*-syah
To the right	**A la derecha**	ah lah deh-*reh*-chah

English	Spanish	Pronunciation
To the left	**A la izquierda**	ah lah ees-*kyehr*-dah
Straight ahead	**Derecho** deh-	*reh*-choh
I would like . . .	**Quisiera . . .** kee-	*syeh*-rah
I want . . .	**Quiero . . .**	*kyeh*-roh
to eat	**comer** koh-	*mehr*
a room	**una habitación**	*oon*-nah ah-bee-tah-*syohn*
Do you have . . . ?	**¿Tiene usted . . .?**	*tyeh*-neh oo-*sted*
a book	**un libro** oon	*lee*-broh
a dictionary	**un diccionario** oon	deek-syoh-*nah*-ryoh
How much is it?	**¿Cuánto cuesta?**	*kwahn*-toh *kweh*-stah?
When?	**¿Cuándo?**	*kwahn*-doh?
What?	**¿Qué?** kay?	
There is (Is there . . . ?)	**(¿)Hay (. . . ?)** ey	e
What is there?	**¿Qué hay?** keh	eye
Yesterday	**Ayer** ah-	*yer*
Today	**Hoy** oy	
Tomorrow	**Mañana** mah-	*nyah*-nah
Good	**Bueno**	*bweh*-noh
Bad	**Malo**	*mah*-loh
Better (best)	**(Lo) Mejor** (loh)	meh-*hor*
More	**Más** mahs	
Less	**Menos**	*meh*-nohss
No smoking	**Se prohibe fumar** seh	pro-*hee*-beh foo-*mahr*
Postcard	**Tarjeta postal** tar-	*heh*-tah poh-*stahl*
Insect repellent	**Repelente contra**	reh-peh-*lehn*-teh *cohn*-trah
insectos	een-	*sehk*-tohss

MORE USEFUL PHRASES

English	Spanish	Pronunciation
Do you speak English?	**¿Habla usted inglés?**	*ah*-blah oo-*sted* een-*glehss*
Is there anyone here	**¿Hay alguien aquí**	eye *ahl*-gyehn ah-*kee*
who speaks English?	**que hable inglés?** keh	*ah*-bleh een-*glehss*
I speak a little	**Hablo un poco**	*ah*-bloh oon *poh*-koh
Spanish.	**de español.** deh	eh-spah-*nyol*
I don't understand	**No (lo) entiendo**	noh (loh) ehn-*tyehn*-doh
Spanish very well.	**muy bien el español.**	mwee byehn el eh-spah-*nyol*
The meal is good.	**Me gusta la comida.** meh	*goo*-stah lah koh-*mee*-dah
What time is it?	**¿Qué hora es?** keh	*oh*-rah ehss
May I see your menu?	**¿Puedo ver el menú**	*pweh*-doh vehr el meh-*noo*
(la	**carta)?** (lah	*car*-tah)
The check, please.	**La cuenta, por favor.** lah	*kwehn*-tah, pohr fah-*bohr*

English	Spanish	Pronunciation
What do I owe you?	**¿Cuánto le debo?**	*kwahn*-toh leh *deh*-boh
What did you say?	**¿Cómo? (colloquial expression for American "Eh?")**	*koh*-moh?
I want (to see) . . .	**Quiero (ver) . . .**	*kyehr*-oh (vehr)
a room	**un cuarto** or **habitación**	oon *kwar*-toh, *oon*-nah ah-bee-tah-*syohn*
for two persons	**para dos personas**	*pah*-rah dohss pehr-*soh*-nahs
with (without) bathroom	**con (sin) baño**	kohn (seen) *bah*-nyoh
We are staying here only . . .	**Nos quedamos aquí solamente . . .**	nohs keh-*dah*-mohss ah-*kee* soh-lah-*mehn*-teh
1 night	**una noche**	*oo*-nah *noh*-cheh
1 week	**una semana**	*oo*-nah seh-*mah*-nah
We are leaving . . . tomorrow	**Partimos (Salimos) . . . mañana**	pahr- *tee*-mohss (sah-*lee*-mohss) mah-*nya*-nah
Do you accept . . . ? traveler's checks?	**¿Acepta usted . . . ? cheques de viajero?**	ah-*sehp*-tah oo-*sted* *cheh*-kehss deh byah-*heh*-roh

TRANSPORTATION TERMS

English	Spanish	Pronunciation
Airport	**Aeropuerto**	ah-eh-r o-*pwer*-toh
Flight	**Vuelo**	*bweh*-loh
Rental car	**Arrendadora de Autos**	ah-r ehn-dah-*doh*-rah deh *ow*-tohss
Bus	**Autobús**	o w-toh-*boos*
Bus or truck	**Camión**	kah-*myohn*
Local bus	**Micro**	*mee*-kroh
Luggage storage area	**Custodia**	koo-*stoh*-dyah
Arrivals gates	**Llegadas**	y eh-*gah*-dahss
Originates at this station	**Local**	loh-*kahl*
Originates elsewhere	**De Paso**	deh *pah*-soh
First class	**Primera**	pr ee-*meh*-rah
Second class	**Segunda**	seh-*goon*-dah

English	Spanish	Pronunciation
Nonstop	**Sin Escala**	seen eh-*skah*-lah
Baggage claim area	**Recibo de Equipajes**	r eh-*see*-boh deh eh-kee-*pah*-hehss
Waiting room	**Sala de Espera**	*sah*-lah deh eh-*speh*-rah
Toilets	**Baños**	*bah*-nyoss
Ticket window	**Boletería**	boh-leh-teh-*ree*-ah

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